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MEADOWLEIGH:

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE LADIES OF BEVER HOLLOW."

"Give me again my hollow tree,
My crust of bread and liberty!"

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

FRANCES AND LYDIA,

THIS TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE

IS DEDICATED

WITH THEIR SISTER'S TRUE AFFECTION.

REIGATE HILL,
DECEMBER 12, 1863.

MEADOWLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

If I must want those beams I wish, yet grant
That I at least may wish those beams I want.

FRANCIS QUARLE.

"In short, you need not fear for me," she said quietly, as they paced the platform of the Paddington terminus.

"Certainly not," said her companion. "You are not pretty enough to be run away with, you know; you won't set the world on fire, Nelly!"

But the carelessness of his words and tone covered real tenderness.

"And oh, George! do be very, very—" she did not say what, nor did he seem to need it; for after a moment's pause, he answered with a slight laugh—

"Oh yes, I'll be very *very*. And do you be very good too. Mind you write."

"No fear of that! and you?"

"Trust me."

"Two first-class opposites, sir?" said a porter, passing.

"No, one first-class corner, back to the engine," said George; and in another instant he had put his sister into a carriage which had already two gentlemen in it whom he scanned at a glance, busy with the Times and Athenœum.

"Got your ticket?" said George, *sotto voce*, as he stood looking in at her.

"Yes; in my glove."

"All right."

She looked wistfully at him, and her eyes began to shine with tears.

"Suppose that's her!" whispered George suddenly, as a fat woman, with very short skirts and a cotton umbrella, bustled past.

"George! how can you be so disagreeable?"

"Well, but suppose it should be, you know! It might be."

"I shall not suppose any such thing."

Here the engine began to sputter like a great roasting apple; and the train moved a few inches. George disappeared. Two minutes afterwards, he thrust Punch into his sister's hand; saying, "Affection's gift."

"You extravagant fellow," said she; "could not you have saved that three-pence?"

"No, miss, I couldn't. Well, but Eleanor, can't you look a wee bit brighter? Don't let your last look be a dismal one, you know."

"Certainly not; I don't feel dismal at all;

and you know the journey will be a positive treat. I only wish you were going too."

"*Mille grazie!*" with a wry face. "Come, you really *are* off now." And they exchanged a hearty kiss. The train moved off with a brisk pit-pit-pat. The large tears with which her eyelids were overcharged, rolled quietly down and were wiped away. Then she looked at Punch; but she was not in humour for it; she shut it into her little, steel-clasped, morocco bag, and looked out at the passing scene, pre-occupied, and yet taking a secondary kind of interest in it.

"I suppose you've seen what old Vindex says," remarked one gentleman to the other.

"No! Is he at it again?"

A few words were exchanged, of no interest to Eleanor; and the Times was transferred from one to the other.

She thought to herself with a kind of pensive luxury—

"The battle of life is now beginning with

me. I have long felt a strong desire to be useful, I have also a liking for novelty, as I suppose all young people have; therefore I ought to be particularly thankful that in the present case, usefulness and novelty will be combined. I shall be useful to dear mamma in earning money, and, I hope, useful also to Miss Clairvaux, though I have not the least idea in what my duties will consist. Probably they will confine me a good deal to the house. Society, on terms of equality, of course I must not expect. I must know my place, as mamma says, and keep it; if I do not put myself forward, I shall not need to be put back. Nor must I give myself the airs of a heroine in distress, or of decayed gentility, which would be ridiculous indeed, seeing that I am in no way a heroine, and that though we are quite respectable, we are nothing more. Dear mamma commended me to 'the grace of God and my own good sense.' O God, let thy grace be vouchsafed me!"

With this little prayer, the young girl fell into a pleasing train of thought that unconsciously imparted its sweetness and tranquillity to her looks. Though she would not, as her brother phrased it, set the world on fire, she was yet a pretty brunette, with a countenance that united gentleness with decision.

The gentlemen were now talking on the prospects of the coming spring, and the sport they had during the winter; and one of them said:

"Do you hunt now?"

"No."

"Quite given it up?"

"Quite. I went out, the beginning of April last year, the last meet of the season, and that was the last time. I went, because I wanted to see a man I knew would be there, so I just slipped on a red coat and went. The fox led us all along the range of hills to Provis Court, and then it made

a circuit and came back again over the very same ground. I thought, 'well, this is convenient, for it is bringing me straight home.' Instead of that, he turned again and led us all the way back to Provis Court, where he was killed."

"Ha, ha! he led you a pretty dance. The scent does not lie well in this county."

"No, very bad. And birds have been scarce this winter. What a lot of them died last summer. My man frequently came on four or five young partridges, all of them dead together."

"Owing to the heat, I suppose. It was a very hot summer."

"I don't know what it was. My man thought it was owing to their eating the blights. Are you fond of your gun?"

"Oh, very. I am a busy man, but I always contrive to find time for that."

"If you come over to me next season, I think I can give you a good day's sport."

"Thank you. I sent a brace of birds yesterday evening to Miss Clairvaux," (Eleanor could not help starting,) "the lad got there at a quarter to ten, and found the house shut up for the night—mistress and maids in bed."

"No?" said the other; and then there was a merry "ho, ho, ho!"

"Does she *always* go to bed at nine?"

"No; I believe ten is her hour, unless she has a cold or anything of that sort—then hatches are closed, all hands piped to hammocks."

Another "ho, ho, ho!" of course.

"She doesn't seem afraid, living there all by herself," said the second reflectively.

"Oh, no," said the first. "She says there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Well," said the other, "I don't know that there is." And continued his reading.

How Eleanor wished they would go on! Her busy fancy immediately conjured up the

picture of a bustling little woman, seeing to the fastenings, and looking to the fires herself, instead of trusting to the maids. Or, what if a weary invalid, unable to feel her strength equal to her day, and glad of the day's close? She was not a coward at any rate; and she liked early hours. Two good points to begin with.

"What do you think," said one of the gentlemen presently, "of this Church Expansion question?"

"Well, I think there are some grave objections to it."

"Have you read Archbishop Whateley's charge?"

"No."

"Or Dr. Vaughan?"

"No."

"Oh! but then you can't judge."

Pause.

"If I pull out a brick here and a brick there from an old wall, I can judge whether it will come down or not."

"Well, I think we might just as well get those acts repealed which hamper consciences and impede liberty of thought."

Pause.

"If we once begin, there's no knowing where it will stop."

"Oh! you may say that of so many things."

Pause again.

"Men are not agreed on what they want altered. Every one wants to pull out his own brick; and, of course, down will come the wall."

"Oh no! not so bad as that. There are certain things that all are pretty much of a mind about; the chief thing is, that at a certain point some would stop, others would go on."

"Just so; and, of course, the latter would carry their point. You should hear Miss Clairvaux."

"Is she very strong upon it?"

"Oh, wonderful."

No more said. Eleanor began to take a sudden interest in the question of Church Expansion, and to wish she were not so profoundly ignorant of it. It was something that interested Miss Clairvaux, whose opinion seemed valued. Perhaps she was what is called a strong-minded woman, with loud voice, and masculine gait. The idea was not very reassuring.

By and by, one of the speakers resumed:

"Do you know what view Dr. Hurst takes of it?"

"Oh! poor man, I doubt if he takes any. No viewiness about *him*. I only wish that man's head were equal to his heart."

At which they both laughed.

"The circus people are here, I see," said one of the gentlemen, letting down the glass; and a board, inscribed "Meadowleigh" in large letters, informed Eleanor, to her surprise, that she had already reached her destination. The gentlemen scrambled out of the carriage,

one of them snatched up a little hamper of fish, and made his way to a phaeton in waiting, the other politely handed Eleanor out; and she was looking about for a porter, when a shabby lad touched his hat, and accosted her with:

"Be you for Miss Clairvaux?"

"Yes."

"Then you must come alonger me."

"I must look after my boxes first," said Eleanor.

"Ticket, miss," said the porter.

Her boxes were soon carried through the station-house to a little hack poney-carriage, with a remarkably rusty poney, awaiting her at the door. The boy assumed the conduct of it when she had stepped in, and they were soon trotting along a straight piece of road, which presently joined another much older, more sinuous, and more picturesque.

"Do you belong to Miss Clairvaux?" said Eleanor to the boy.

"No; I belongs to the Crown," answered he.

"I dare say you like driving," said Eleanor; on which he looked up at her, as much as to say, do you really suppose I am going to knock up a little chat, instead of attending to the poney's ears?

"Driving requires a deal of thought," remarked he, after carefully transferring his small change into the safest corner of his purse—which was his mouth.

A turn in the road brought them suddenly in sight of a white cottage, with three ancient gables facing the approach, which was over a very jolting piece of common. A dark background of tall trees with rooks' nests, threw out the white cottage in strong relief, though the branches at present were leafless; it looked seclusion itself. There were three large lattices immediately under the eaves, and, on the basement, an oak-grained door with a heavy porch, and two bay-windows.

This Doric simplicity would have made you fancy you saw the ground plan of the building at a glance, had it not been for certain quaint abutments and projections at the sides, the design of which it was impossible to determine. These were evidently mantled in summer time in honeysuckle, passion-flower, and Wisteria Cinensis, which now only spread out their bare and fettered limbs against the walls, as if in mute protest.

"Them's the Peaks," said the boy, nodding at the cottage. "Some calls it the Peaked House."

"It's very pretty," said Eleanor, looking earnestly at it; "only rather lonely."

"We don't take no count o' that, *we* don't," said the boy.

Saying which, he violently whirled the little vehicle up to the gate, reckless of its being Crown property, jumped out, ran up to the door, and loudly rang the bell. A pretty young maid servant came out, who smiled

welcome; and in the background stood a tall lady, drawing a China crape shawl around her, to protect herself from the draught.

"Welcome to the Peaks, my dear," said she very kindly, as she shook hands with Eleanor. "Go into the dining-room and warm yourself. I'll settle with the boy."

Saying which, she put one shilling and threepence into his hand.

"Please, mum, I ought to have one and six," said the boy.

"Oh! ought you?" said Miss Clairvaux coolly. "I think I know what you ought to have by this time. The gratuity is entirely optional, and you know very well you go more than twice the distance for sixpence."

"Nobody gives me coppers," murmured he.

"If that is all, give me back the halfpence, and here is a threepenny piece. No, it is fourpence—I will give it you, but not because you have a right to it. No wonder you

object to coppers if you keep your money in your mouth! Would you like me to give you an old purse? Very well, here is one, (taking it out of the side-board drawer,) which has only a small hole in it; it will do very well for halfpence, and then you need not object to coppers."

The purse was fully worth sixpence, and the servant of the Crown departed with a broad smile of joy irradiating his face. Eleanor was quite taken by surprise at this winding up of the scene. Miss Clairvaux did not give it a second thought; but leaving her neat maids (the youngest of whom had a mouth too much crowded with teeth,) to carry up the boxes, she returned to the dining-room.

She looked much nearer fifty than forty; but her dark hair had neither changed colour nor lost its brightness. She was erect without being in the least stiff, which, probably, was owing in some measure to her wearing

neither whalebone nor steel. Her complexion was clear brown, without any rose-tint; her features regular, though somewhat attenuated, and at times there were certain lines in her face that made it rather haggard. But her smile was sweetness itself, and her dark blue-grey eyes were large, soft, and bright.

As for her dress, it must be owned she wanted a hoop, or, at any rate, did not wear one; but her steel-coloured silk dress fitted well, and reached the ground in ample folds. At least half her hair was covered by a transparent lace cap, with just a *soupçon* of ribbon. Caps and carpets should never force themselves on attention.

"Those boys," said she good-humouredly, "will always encroach when they can; but I know exactly what is their due. Well, my dear, are you tired with your journey? I did not know whether you would dine before you started, and I always dine early myself,

so I have ordered what people call a severe tea, which will suit you in either case, and it will be ready when you are. I will show you your room."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself, ma'am, pray," said Eleanor hastily; but she led the way without taking notice. They crossed a very pretty, irregular-shaped hall, which, having a bureau, china shelf, some large china jars, and other pieces of old-fashioned furniture in it, had a quaint, comfortable look. It had a glass-door, with steps into the garden at the back, which, being full of evergreens, looked cheerful in winter.

Miss Clairvaux led the way up some shallow stairs carpetted with crimson drugget, into a pretty country bed-room with white furniture fringed with blue.

"Oh! what a nice bed-room!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"This is my best bed-room, as you may suppose," said Miss Clairvaux. "Adjoining

it is a smaller one, where you may sleep upon occasion; but, meanwhile, there is no reason why you should not have the best room and keep it aired. On the other side of the landing is my own room, with dressing-room attached; the servants have an attic at the back. There is also another room half way up the stairs; but it is seldom or never occupied, and no need it should be! With all these rooms filled, and that, too, my house would not be the Three Peaks, but Peak Inn!"

CHAPTER II.

Like as my parloure so my hall
And kitchen's small;
A little buttery, and therein
A little bin;
Some little sticks of thorn or briar
Make me a fire,
Close by whose living coal I sit
And glow like it;
The threshold of my doore
Is worn by the poore
Who thither come, and freely get
Good words or meate.—HERRICK.

WHAT a curious feeling one sometimes has, on entering as a stranger a dwelling stamped with the impress of another's individuality, and bearing the marks of long

and comfortable occupation, where we are probably destined to make a permanent stay! Those chairs, tables, curtains, now so unfamiliar, will hereafter form the accessories of a picture to which we shall revert in many a lonely night-watch with pleasure or pain. Our hand may become acquainted with every book on those shelves, our eye with every shade in those pictures; we may come to have our favourite seat and footstool, our recognized corner, where now all looks so new and strange.

Miss Clairvaux's sitting-room was more of the morning-room than drawing-room; with nothing of that company look which one sees in a room seldom used except to receive visitors. It was plain that she occupied it the greater part of the day: it was nearly square, and had a bow-window looking into the garden at the side of the house, as well as a window to the front. Books had accumulated on various tables, but without untidiness, and

there were a good many ranged on shelves and in niches. A davenport near the fire, a handsome piano, and plenty of music books and portfolios, gave promise of pleasant indoor resources.

The severe tea included a hot partridge; and Miss Clairvaux seemed to give only two strokes to the bird, and thereby divide it in three as easily as if it were orange-peel.

"You must be hungry, my dear," said she, helping her young guest to gravy and bread-sauce, and then pouring rich cream into the teacups. "You like milk and sugar, I suppose. No sugar? neither do I. Well, and was the water much out over the country?"

"In some parts, ma'am," said Eleanor; "but nowhere so much as in this neighbourhood."

"Just what I expected to hear," said Miss Clairvaux with evident satisfaction. "I am

determined not to pay my highway-rate while the road to the parish church is under water."

"Can it be helped, then?"

"Helped? yes! if men would but exert themselves instead of sitting by their fires reading the Times. The county is full of day-labourers out of work, eager for something to do and something to eat. It wears my heart out. I give them food as long as there is anything in the pantry, and I have invented little odd jobs for them, and paid them for their work as far as I could do it, which is a man's business, not mine; but who can sit still and see labourers starve? All last summer, water was *wanting*—water for the table, water for cows and horses, water for the laundresses, water for the gardens. I know people who paid a shilling a day to have water fetched. I made all welcome to my spring who liked to come to it, and if I had had a farthing a pail, I should

have cleared a pretty penny. *Now* they come round for a water-rate; and, with water all across the road, they lay on a highway-rate. Next, I suppose, there'll be lighting and paving, and, though I detest gas, they will stick up a hideous lamp at my gate, and make me pay for it!"

Though Miss Clairvaux's brow contracted while she spoke of these enormities, it cleared directly afterwards; and there was remarkable kindliness in her look and manner as she did the simple honours of her table. As they rose from it, she said:

"The postman calls for the letters at eight o'clock, so we have no time to lose;" and without another word sat down to her davenport.

Eleanor, finding herself at liberty to follow the example, fetched her writing-case, and began as follows:—

"The Peaked House.

"Meadowleigh.

"Thursday evening.

"My dearest, dearest mother!

"How long it already seems since I saw you! but I am not in the least low-spirited. On the contrary, I am quite cheerful and being made much of, like a favoured guest rather than a poor companion My journey did not seem at all long, and was without the smallest incident. A little hired carriage was waiting for me at the station, and the boy soon drove me here, where Miss Clairvaux gave me the kindest reception conceivable. I like her very much already. She is not in the least like what I expected—indeed I drew so many imaginary pictures of her that she could not resemble them all, and she resembles none. She is rather older than you, I think; taller, darker, and thinner. I might almost call her handsome; she reminds

me of the Melpomene on the cameo Maurice gave me. She made me eat some partridge at tea; and chatted so pleasantly that it seemed to me as if we were old friends; and yet we could scarcely know less of one another; for Mrs. Mapleson seems to have told her as little of us as she told us of her. Miss Clairvaux said to me at tea-time, 'My dear, all I know of you is, that your mother is a widow, and that you are a good daughter, and were looking out for a situation.' I wonder what my situation here is to be! Probably she will tell me my duties to-morrow. I do not expect them to be very arduous. It is very pleasant her calling me 'my dear,' and she says she does not like to be frequently called 'ma'am.' Thus, you see, we are on a pleasant footing from the first; and she says that when I have spent one day with her, I may guess what all the days in the year will be—there is not the least variety.

"As for the house, which is a white cottage

with three peaks, it is comfort itself, and seems built to accord with the line,

'Mine be a cot beside a hill;'

for there is a rising ground in front, covered with turf and patches of heath and furze, and full of dents and dimples—such as Hobbima and Ruysdael loved. Miss Clairvaux says her father and mother spent their honeymoon in this cottage, and that is one reason why she is fond of it. Her establishment consists of two maid-servants, nice-looking girls from eighteen to twenty-two, very neat and pleasant mannered.

"And now, what more have I to say? There are a good many old prints, crayon-drawings, and a few pictures about the house. A very fair copy of Gainsborough's 'Girl and Pitcher' hangs opposite to me now. In my room are some little heads by Cipriani and Bartolozzi—graceful, of course, but rather feeble.

"Good-bye, my dearest, dearest mother! I long to know how you get on in the evenings, and whether George comes home early and reads to you, as he said he would. I hope Mary will be a good girl, and save you all the trouble she can. When I come home again, I hope to find her quite a nice little cook. Do not over-tire yourself, dearest mamma. My dear love to George. May God's blessing be on you both, and on me, too. I know we shall always be thinking of one another.

"Your ever affectionate daughter,

"ELEANOR GRAYDON."

"So now we have drawn each other's pictures," said Miss Clairvaux, finishing her note as Eleanor folded hers.

"Pictures?" repeated Eleanor, rather consciously.

"Why, of course you have told your mamma what you think of me; at any

rate, I have given Mrs. Mapleson my first impressions of you. Shall we exchange likenesses?"

"Oh! no; I think we had better not," said Eleanor hastily.

"I think so, too," said Miss Clairvaux laughing. "I only meant to give you a fright. I have not the least curiosity. Curiosity is the vice of an unoccupied mind." And she began another letter, pausing from time to time, and reflecting deeply. The only remark with which she broke a long silence, was while directing one of her letters.

"Don't you think Foljambe an ugly name?"

"Certainly I do not admire it," said Eleanor; "but it is new to me."

"Oh! but it is an old name—old as the hills." And she resumed her pen.

"Here comes Trim," observed she, as the postman's firm tread was heard on the gravel

walk. "Why does not he blow his horn, I wonder?"

She took up her letters and Eleanor's note, and carried them out herself, and on the house door being opened, the following colloquy ensued.

"Why, Trim, why don't you blow your horn?"

"Oh! bless you ma'am," (with a jolly, deep-toned laugh,) "the boys and girls do make such a row about it."

"Why, you don't mean to say a great, strong man like you minds the boys and girls?"

"Oh! faith, but I do, though. Why, they call out, 'Little boy blue, come blow your horn.'"

"Well, and if they do?" said Miss Clairvaux laughing.

"Oh, hang it! I can't stand that. Why it makes even *you* laugh —"

"I laugh at your minding being laughed at —"

"*Mind* it? Why, when they begin to laugh, I begin to laugh; and then, instead of a blow, there comes out a sort of a bray."

This upset Miss Clairvaux and her housemaid at one and the same moment, and the little hall rang with such irrepressible merriment, that Trim, a fine, stalwart, handsome man, could stand it no longer, but, bagging the letters, strode off into the dark, saying:

"Catch me blowing the horn any more. If I do, I'll be blowed."

"There's a specimen of our rusticity," said Miss Clairvaux, coming back. "Who would have thought of such shamefacedness in a navvy that has had his hand shattered in the Crimea?"

She shivered a little, and drawing her easy chair close to the fire, placed herself in it, with her back to the lights, and fell into a deep reverie.

A long silence ensued, which Eleanor accidentally broke by dropping her scissors

on the table. Miss Clairvaux gave a violent start.

"My dear," said she, "I had utterly forgotten you were here. You must forgive my absence-fits. I have so long lived alone that I hardly know how to behave in society. That is one reason why it will be good for me to have you here—you will keep me up to the mark."

"Oh, dear!" said Eleanor, laughing at what appeared to her a whimsical notion.

"I am quite serious, I assure you," said Miss Clairvaux. "And now come closer to the fire, and let us be sociable. I shall not be easy, though, unless you take that footstool. Are you quite comfortable now?"

"Quite, ma'am, thank you," said Eleanor; and then there was another pause.

"Do you ever write your letters twice over?" said Miss Clairvaux presently.

"Oh, no!" said Eleanor with surprise.

"*I* do, not unfrequently—twice, thrice.

I am apt to put things too strongly at first. It is better to tone them down, than to run the chance of giving pain."

"My few letters are calculated to give no pain—and little pleasure."

"That will not be the case henceforth, I fancy. Your letters will be your mother's daily treat—her one great pleasure."

"Mamma does not expect me to write more than once or twice a week; it would be too expensive."

"True; it is surprising how much one muddles away in stamps, just because they are only a penny each. When one wrote seldomer, one perhaps gave as much pleasure and did as much good. Half the chit-chat letters that are posted, might as well or better be left unwritten, for a single useful or wise thought to be found in them. With regard to business-letters, however, the benefit of the penny-post is great. A lengthy correspondence with a lawyer at the old

rate would half ruin a woman of small income."

"I hope never to have such a correspondence," said Eleanor laughing, "for more reasons than one."

"Of course; but if, for example, your little income were in jeopardy, and you were obliged to take legal advice lest you should lose it all, you would be glad to have it even at the cost of a penny postage. Do you think me fond of money?" said she, interupting herself and smiling. "No, I am not."

"It is difficult, sometimes, not to wish for a little more than one has," said Eleanor.

"But the rich do so quite as much as the poor. All who live quite up to their means, feel the want of more, whenever an emergency occurs. And then, again, when people acquire the habit of setting something by for an emergency, it is difficult, sometimes to convince them that the emergency has

really arrived. They become hoarders. I have sometimes been pressed, as perhaps you have, to collect for some charitable purpose—for the Jews, for the Irish, for ever so many things—I always do so reluctantly, for I would far rather give my trifle and have done with it. But we must not always consider what we had rather do; so, from time to time, I find myself undertaking a house to house visitation. I have always found the people who have least to give, give most readily. Your widows, living on next to nothing—your single gentlewomen that can just keep up appearances—your married people who have just worked their heads above water—these are the persons who give of their little with a simply expressed regret that they can do no more, and their hope that you will find more liberal contributors. But when fine ladies tell me they really have had such an expensive season, they have nothing in their purses—or

perhaps a smart footman comes to me with 'my mistress says she already subscribes to the National Benevolent'—I know it is only what I had to expect, and regret having wasted my time."

The clock struck nine, and Miss Clairvaux rang for prayers.

"I read a chapter, verse and verse about, with my maids," said she, "and find it a very good plan. It keeps up their attention and improves their reading."

Eleanor readily joined in the quaint little service, and was surprised to find how interesting it could be made. Supper followed, and they went up to bed at ten.

The weather was still cold, and Eleanor felt truly grateful for the brisk little wood-fire burning on her hearth. She was tempted to sit over it, musing over the events of the day.

"How well we seem to understand one another already," thought she, "and how

completely ignorant we are of each other's antecedents! I am glad it is not just the other way." She had yet to learn that there were many sides to Miss Clairvaux's character.

She indulged in reverie so long, and then unpacked in such a leisurely manner that the old clock on the stairs struck eleven before she was in bed. "O dear," thought she, "I am abusing my privileges! My candle will tell tales." And she extinguished it and said her prayers in the dark.

Next morning, Eleanor was roused from dreamless sleep such as she had not lately enjoyed, by a sharply rung bell; and soon after, a tap at her door was followed by the announcement, "your hot water, miss." She sprang up and took it in, then peeped between the curtains to see how the country looked. How peaceful and cheerful it appeared! Though the trees were leafless, their fine, intersecting branches formed delicate

tracery against the cold grey sky. Foot-tracks here and there, across the undulating common, led to inviting uplands; a few thatched roofs peered here and there out of hollows, betokening rustic neighbours. The front garden of the Peaked House was narrow, and at present only boasted crocuses and a few early spring flowers. Eleanor looked long and too long about her; then hurried her toilette, and presently heard the bell again ring smartly; after which, the housemaid outside her door said, "Please, miss, mistress is waiting for you to come to prayers."

Eleanor, quite ashamed, hastened down stairs as soon as she could, looking very guilty.

Miss Clairvaux was rather put out. "Good morning, my dear," said she shortly, "we are early people here—you will learn to be early too when you have been here a little while. We will now have prayers."

By the time prayers were over, Miss Clairvaux was all serenity and kindliness. After breakfast, she disappeared; and Eleanor took out her work. Miss Clairvaux, after spending some time in the supervision of her household affairs, came in and prepared to write.

"Can I do anything for you, ma'am?" said Eleanor.

"Nothing, thank you," said Miss Clairvaux. Some time later, Miss Clairvaux suddenly said—

"By the by, would not you like to walk somewhere?"

"Just as you please, ma'am —"

"My dear! you have only to please yourself. This is Liberty Hall."

"Perhaps," said Eleanor, hesitating a little, "you will be kind enough, when more at leisure, to tell me what are my duties."

"Your duties, my dear! You have only to employ and amuse yourself as you like

—I have nothing to set you about. Why, you look disappointed! —"

"O no!—only —"

"Only what?"

"As nothing was defined in our engagement, I thought there had been something to be done —"

"Why, you advertised to live with an elderly lady, did not you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, you *are* living with an elderly lady," said Miss Clairvaux laughing, and resuming her pen. She only wrote a few words, however, and then seemed to reflect.

"Poor girl," said she, "you are doubtless disappointed, as I should have been in your place, to find no active course of usefulness immediately provided for you. My dear, I had none such to offer. I heard of you through Mrs. Mapleson, who told me that your father, a very meritorious artist, had died after a few days of intense suffering,

in consequence of a poisonous ingredient used in his art having been accidentally communicated to a slight crack on his lip. Was it so?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Eleanor, with filling eyes.

"She added," continued Miss Clairvaux very compassionately, "that, your brother having shown a decided predilection for surgery, your parents had put themselves to great straits in order to give him a good professional education and enable him to walk the hospitals, and that you yourself had, by your industry and talent, contributed towards this —"

"Very little—not worth mentioning, I assure you," said Eleanor.

"Well, it appeared that your mother and you were left nearly unprovided for, and your brother was as yet unable to do anything for you—on the contrary, an expense to you."

"Oh, you should not say that, indeed, ma'am!" cried Eleanor, "you cannot think how economical and self-denying he is!"

"I am very glad to hear it. Mrs. Mapleson gave me to understand as much, which interested me in him and in you all. I felt a great desire to serve you. Mrs. Mapleson said you were willing to go out as governess to young children, or companion to an elderly lady; or, in short, do anything that would prevent your burthening your mother, and enable you to contribute a little to her comfort. I inquired for you, but without success; no one among my acquaintance happened to be in want of a governess or companion. I was grieved, too, almost shocked, to find what low salaries were given. I have known governesses who received eighty and a hundred guineas a year in affluent, but by no means aristocratic families. I knew a lady who was offered two hundred a year to complete the education of a single pupil,

with the assistance of masters. I was quite disappointed, therefore, to hear people talk of forty, thirty, and even twenty guinea salaries. At length, I heard of a lady who wanted an instructress for her three little children, and who would give twenty-five guineas. This seemed to me quite below your deserts, but I asked Mrs. Mapleson whether she thought it worth offering you. She replied, that, nothing better having occurred, you were prepared to accept it. I had to write word to her by the next post, that the situation was filled! It so disappointed me to do this, and I pictured to myself your disappointment in such lively colours, that I reflected whether, by closely regulating my expenses in other matters, I might not afford myself a companion on the same terms; and I found that I could. I had never thought of having a companion, for I have learnt to enjoy solitude; but it is a selfish indulgence, and I had already

had a very fair allowance of it. Therefore I briefly wrote to Mrs. Mapleson to engage you for myself, as the other situation was gone."

"Oh, how good of you!" exclaimed Eleanor, starting up to kiss her, and then stopping short.

"Pray kiss me if you will," said Miss Clairvaux smiling, and meeting her halfway—"I would have kissed you last night, when you went to bed, only I am not very demonstrative, and I did not know how you might take it."

"But, dear Miss Clairvaux, how very, very kind of you!" said Eleanor, between laughing and crying. "Only I am so sorry to have come to be but an incumbrance!"

"Oh, you will not be that; and besides, there is no necessity for your staying, if we don't get on together. In fact, it only occurred to me at first, as a stop-gap, which would take you off your mother's hands while you looked about for something better."

"I am sure I shall not find anything better."

"Oh yes, you may, if you do it at leisure."

"I shall not want to do so, unless you want to part with me. I feel sure we shall be happy together, though it seems very conceited of me to say so."

"Not at all. I think so too."

"Only I am so sorry I should be a needless expense to you —"

"O, pray do not trouble yourself about that. I counted the cost before I engaged you, and would not have done so if I had found I could not afford it. Besides, though I did not want you, I may learn to like having you. I used to be sociable enough. It is well for me not to live too completely out of the eye of my fellow-creatures; there is no knowing what misdemeanours they might lay to my charge without my being able to refute them. They might accuse me of coining!"

"But is there not anything you can set me about?"

"Oh yes, a variety of things, when I have had time to look about me a little. See all these books—they are new acquisitions—surplus copies of Mudie's, which I have had half-bound. I must have room for them on those shelves, where I think you may pack them away if you are skilful; but those already on the upper shelf must come down first. Will you undertake it?"

"Oh yes, gladly."

"Perhaps those on the top shelf may be dusty—Claudia shall bring you a soft duster. What do you think of that name for a housemaid? Some of my neighbours wonder how I can use it, and say they should call her Mary or Lizzy; but I tell them there is Scripture warrant for the name—and I doubt if there be any for calling her out of it. Surely tyranny could hardly be more captiously exerted than in denying poor

people the choice of their children's names, or refusing to call them by them! They might as well limit them to wearing ugly colours or singing ugly tunes, as to choosing ugly names!"

CHAPTER III.

Preserve me from the thing I dread and hate—
A duel in the form of a debate.

COWPER.

Miss Clairvaux had left the room, and Eleanor, standing on a chair was busily occupied in arranging the books, and now and then reading a pleasant snatch in them, when Claudia opened the door and announced Mr. Debenham.

Lightly as a bird from a spray did Eleanor descend from her perch, and shyly bow as a gentleman entered whom she at once recognised as one of her fellow-travellers of

the preceding day. He, too, seemed, after a second look, to have a dim perception of having recently seen her, and said rather awkwardly, "oh! good morning, ma'am."

Eleanor was about to retreat, when she upset a row of the British Essayists, which were not yet replaced. With an exclamation at her own awkwardness, she began hastily to scramble them together; and Mr. Debenham, laying aside his hat and stick, was preparing to assist her, when Miss Clairvaux entered the room.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Debenham," said she cheerfully. "Eleanor, you need not run away. Mr. Debenham, I have to thank you for a beautiful brace of birds; but I have a bone to pick with you too. How came you to wrap them up in a copy of the Browbeater, a paper that I never allow to come into my house? Oh fie, Mr. Debenham! I am ashamed of you for taking it in."

"Why, Miss Clairvaux, a man must have

something to keep himself awake on Sundays —"

"Worse and worse! *much* worse! Now you are out of the frying-pan into the fire! If I were the licenser, and obliged to license such papers at all, they should come out on Monday, instead of desecrating the sabbath."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, you may laugh, but it should be so. It should, indeed."

"You are too hard on a paper you never read."

"Nay, I looked through the number you sent, just to see of what stamp it was."

"Why, the readers of the worst book that ever was written might make that excuse," said Mr. Debenham laughing, "and pretend they only ran through it just to see of what stamp it was."

"Exactly so, and a great many do, I'm afraid."

"Well, but what harm did you find in the Browbeater?"

"I found in it a defence of sabbath-breaking, with a sneer at the Pharisaical people who keep the Lord's day holy."

"Oh, but there are so many ways of keeping it."

"That is quite true; but we may be quite sure that those who open shops, and keep officials at their desks, and send haymakers to work on Sundays, don't keep it at all. And with all their cry about not robbing the poor man of his amusements, they are robbing the poor man of his only day's rest."

"Well, at any rate you'll own *I* don't do any of those things."

"Oh, I'm not speaking against any one in particular, only against the Browbeater."

"But if you dislike it so much, why did you read it?" said he, still laughing.

"It is my duty to see what comes into the house. If I see a phial, or a little packet

of some unknown powder, lying on the kitchen dresser, do not I test it, or at least inquire into it? otherwise we might all be poisonel. Just the same with what is in print. Why, your Browbeater might have found its way into the kitchen-drawer, to light the fires, and Claudia might have read it, had I not taken it off the birds—and beautiful birds they were!"

"I'm afraid they're the last you 'll have this year, for partridge-shooting ends to-morrow. Next autumn, I'll recollect, if I can, to send you a brace in the Record, or say the Illustrated News, or say in no paper at all—that's the best way. But now I want to know, Miss Clairvaux, why you won't pay your highway rate?"

"Just use your eyes as to the state of the highways! you know you were obliged to ride here."

"Oh, but there are stepping-stones."

"I can't cross water on stepping-stones;

it turns me giddy. At any rate I won't pay for a highway when there is none."

"You'll get yourself into trouble, I'm afraid. We shall be obliged to have you up before the magistrates."

"Then they must send a fly for me. There are several things I shall be glad to draw their attention to in a friendly way."

"But they are not answerable for the weather! only think what rains we have had! and then the frost! and then the thaw!"

"And consider how many poor men were necessarily out of work during the frost, and would have been thankful for a job, and you and your brother magnates would not give them one, and preferred sending them to the Union, which is *not* a worthy place of refuge for the honest and the good, nor for the very old, nor the very young; but which has purposely been made a place that even the idle and dissolute will not stay in a day longer

than they can. Oh, Mr. Debenham! I assure you I could cry about it!"

"Well, Miss Clairvaux, this is a long way from your highway-rate!"

"But not a long way from the poor men you might have set, first to break up the ice and sweep off the snow on that highway, and scrape the mud off it afterwards. Blessed is he that considereth the ——"

"Well, I am quite aware you did consider the poor and needy, and lightened the parish burthens to the utmost of your ability; and if everybody had done as much, according to their means, there would not be such a heavy poor-rate as we are likely to have some of these days."

"Mr. Debenham, I am not praising myself nor depreciating others. What I did, I did partly to relieve my own aching heart, and partly because I could not endure to turn men from my door who were willing to work. I never grudge the poor-rate, though I

disapprove the way it is applied. I said to Mr. Joss, the last time he came for it, now, tell me, Mr. Joss, if a decent labourer, (you may distinguish him readily enough from a tramp) comes to you and asks for relief, and you say 'why don't you work?' and he says 'I would if I could, but where am I to get it?' what do you say next? 'Well, ma'am,' said he, (these were his very words) 'I tell you what I often do, put my hand in my pocket and give him something. May be I should send him to the Union, *but I can't do it*, though I was born in a Union, bred in a Union, and my father has kept a Union thirty-seven years.' Those were the words of Mr. Joss. Now, what do you think of that?"

"Well, Miss Clairvaux, I'm afraid you won't mend it by not paying your ——"

"We talk of our public charities, and we carry our heads high, we English, and we boast of our fine yeomanry and peasantry,

and how do we treat them? An industrious old couple, whose well brought up children are dead or dispersed, are at last past work, with no one to look after them; and what is the fruit of the poor-rates we have cheerfully paid to provide for the aged and needy? They are carted off to the Union, and *there separated.* 'Whom God has joined, man puts asunder.' Mr. Joss used those very words. The old woman is shut up in a ward with a number of other old women, some deaf, some blind, some stupid, some peevish, some full of aches and pains, all of them requiring the aid and cheerfulness of younger, brisker companions, none of them able to be of much use to one another, or to take much interest in one another, and there they are left to do nothing. Instead of the cheap and comfortable cup of tea which they used to enjoy twice a day all their lives, they have to breakfast on gruel, which is not only unpalatable to them, but which weakens and often

disagrees with them. You may laugh, but try it!"

"No, thank you, I'll take your word for it."

"You may, for it is a known fact. Medical men will tell you that gruel is lowering. We give it in feverish colds. Poor old people want keeping up, not lowering, but in the Union they must have gruel for breakfast or nothing. With nothing to do, nothing to think of but their food, and that food distasteful, how can their minds do otherwise than prey upon themselves? they have nothing better to look for, they are to live thus till they die, they have nothing to amuse or interest the mind, not even a child, or the twiddling over a baby's cap; the past can only, as far as their fading memories can recall it, afford bitter regrets. What wonder that many should become imbecile or insane? They do! See the returns from the Belfast Union. They are frightful."

"Well, this is all very bad, of course; but—"

"Yes, it is all very bad, but it need not be of course. Even supposing that the poor in the Unions should only be supplied with the bare necessaries of life, it need not be in the most distasteful form, nor should casual treats, casual alleviations, in the visits and little presents of sympathizing persons be denied them. But it is very difficult to obtain access to the inmates, unless you be related to one of them. And their relations, poor people like themselves, have no time for visiting, nor money to supply their little comforts, such as tea and snuff. The affections, the tastes, are absolutely without nutriment, and you might as well expect silk-worms to live without mulberry leaves. The end will be that they will become imbecile or insane."

"Oh, ho, ho!"

"It is no laughing matter," said Miss Clairvaux with great energy, "it's a deep wrong."

"I see I've no chance, you've completely taken the whip-hand of me. Well, Miss Clairvaux, your feelings do you great honour, I assure you I mean it; and your conduct has been quite consistent with them. I see you are determined to be a village Hampden in the matter, and make a ship-money affair of it. All I can say is, I wish you safely through it; and when you find yourself in the hands of justice, send for me and I'll try to get you out."

"Thank you for your promise. I don't doubt I shall keep out of harm, but I am obliged to you all the same. I hope Mrs. Debenham is well—"

"Quite, thank you. She desired her compliments—"

"It is a long time since I have seen her, but you know it is impossible for me to go into the town. I can't venture on those stepping stones."

"Why not have a fly?"

"Where's the money to come from? you think I'm made of money, I believe."

"Well, you have everything so nice about you, that certainly there seems no want of it."

"I must save it to mend the roads. Here's my young friend come down from London, and just now I proposed to her a walk somewhere, but really on second thoughts I could not tell where she could go, except ancle deep. We ought to have stilts, like the peasants of the Landes."

"Oh, what dreadful exaggeration! Do come out and make your own observations. You sit over the fire with a good novel in this pretty room till you fancy things outside worse than they are."

"I scorn to read novels by daylight, at any time. In the evening they are well enough now and then, if I have nothing better to do. Oh no, I never trust to other persons' reports when I can use my own eyes. I have only

to go up the slope in front of the house and take a panoramic observation."

"The summer is coming, and panoramic observations will then be agreeable enough. I have to thank the state of the roads for having kept you at home, and thereby enabled me to see you. The waters will soon subside between you and the church, and then you will no longer be in this alarming state of spiritual destitution."

And with a bow and a laugh, he went off.

"I really believe," said Miss Clairvaux, "that he only sent the partridges to soften me about the highway-rate. Much obliged to him I am! I have not yielded him an inch, that's one comfort."

"Are you not in danger of getting into some trouble, ma'am?" said Eleanor rather uneasily.

"Tut! no, my dear, or, if I do, I shall doubtless get out of it again. Nothing would

trouble me more than not to carry my point. He only said what he did in order to frighten me; however, I am not so easily frightened. Justice, indeed!".

CHAPTER IV.

Ham.—Why did you laugh, then, when I said, Man delights not me?

Ros.—To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you .....

[*Flourish of trumpets within.*]

Guil.—There are the players.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK.

"It is a fine afternoon," said Miss Clairvaux, after their early dinner, "and, in spite of what I said, perhaps rather strongly to Mr. Debenham, I think we may manage a walk if we keep to the high grounds; where, indeed, the view is finest, and the air always freshest."

Accordingly they equipped themselves, and were soon on their way to the upland ridge, attended by a minute specimen of the canine race, answering to the name of Fly.

When they had gained the summit of a gently rising ground, diversified by not a few mole-hills and rabbit-holes, in the latter of which Fly often buried his head at the apparent peril of his existence, they reached a spot where they had a pretty extensive view over the adjacent country.

"There!" said Miss Clairvaux, stopping short, and looking with evident complacence at several large patches of water on the lower ground, "is it not as I say? just see the state of the country! especially the road between, me and the church. The idea of paying a highway-rate!"

"The country is improved in an artistic point of view," observed Eleanor, "by the introduction of a little water, the only thing it would otherwise want."

"Yes, that is true," said Miss Clairvaux, looking at it with more pleasure; and she directed Eleanor's attention to a far-off cathedral, and to several scattered villages and country-seats, a Roman bath, and a battle-field in the wars of the Roses. There was a curious old house, nearer at hand, which struck Eleanor with its air of gloomy seclusion. The garden was inclosed with high stone walls, capped here and there with great balls and funereal-looking urns; over the walls rose dark, sombre ever-greens and spiry poplars. The only glimpse they permitted of the garden shewed a great aloe in a square wooden box near a formal summer-house. The house itself had half the windows blocked up on the side next the road; and, facing the north, had a dreary aspect.

"Who lives in that dismal house?" said Eleanor.

"Do you call it dismal?" said Miss Clairvaux. "Yes, I believe you may, though I

am used to it. A very good, though eccentric man lives there, his name is Newland; an old bachelor, a Nonconformist, a great student, a man of good parts but weak nerves; a very valetudinarian who fancies himself unable to stir from his fireside, and who yet, in his day, led an active life, hunted all the morning, danced all the evening, and was a useful man in public life."

"What is he like?"

"He is never seen, except by his doctor, his minister, and his servants. Now and then, some one gets access to him on business, and comes away with very round eyes and raised eyebrows, to give all the petty details of the wild beast in his den—his slippers, his waste-paper basket—nothings, in short. There is nothing to tell; his life is perfectly monotonous. I can understand his love of solitude well enough, for I have something of it, too; but not his shutting himself up from the face of nature, unless upon compulsion. You know—

'The man, to solitude accustomed long
Perceives in everything that lives, a tongue—'

finds sermons in stones and good in everything—companionship in everything. But I believe that if I were shut up from the free air which seems needful to my very life, I should be ready to beat myself against the bars of my cage."

After a pause, during which Miss Clairvanx seemed drinking in the pure air she was praising, Eleanor said, "What could make him shut himself up so?"

"Mr. Newland, do you mean? I had forgotten all about him. Oh, his health, or the want of it. People talk, at least Mrs. Plover does, about some disappointment of the affections. I believe she knows no more of the matter than you do. Mrs. Plover must talk—every neighbourhood has its Mrs. Plover. Some day, she will talk of you and me."

"Dear me, I hope not!" said Eleanor. "What should she say?"

"What, indeed," said Miss Clairvaux, amused. "Mrs. Plovers are seldom at a loss for something to say; but sometimes they content themselves with things that are not hurtful, only foolish."

"I hope it will be long before she finds it worth her while to have either to say about me," said Eleanor.

"Never mind: we are all used to her. It is one of the disadvantages of small neighbourhoods, that foolish people will talk of their neighbours' affairs."

There were other country-houses, with a good deal to say about each; and the keen air which ruffled their garments, and made them speak in raised voices, was very inspiriting. At some little distance, three children were playing on the brow of the hill; one of them, a little fellow, suddenly separated from the others, and converting his arms and legs into the spokes of a wheel, began trundling down the slope with incredible

rapidity, while his two playmates stood aghast. Having reached the door of a cottage he went in.

"That child must be professional!" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux. "I never saw anything like it, except in a regular tumbler. Who on earth can he be? I must go and see."

Eleanor had just been about to inquire why a bright scarlet pennon was streaming from a tent, or marquee, on the skirts of the town; and she now pointed it out to Miss Clairvaux.

"Ah! that explains," said she. "I remember, a bill printed in large letters was thrown over the gate,—which I took possession of after a glance at it, lest it should be seen by the servants. There is no need to tantalize them with invitations to amusements they are not allowed to indulge in, and I do not patronize the circus-people. Doubtless this young rogue has learnt to

imitate them; but yet I don't think he looked like one of the Dicks."

While Miss Clairvaux thus discoursed, they were briskly descending the slope; at the foot of which stood the crumbling old cottage. On Miss Clairvaux raising the latch, the door was suddenly flung open with the exclamation: "here we all are!" and she started as if electrified at finding herself within two inches of a clown in red and white paint.

"Why, how in the world comes this?" said she hastily.

"Oh, bless 'ee, ma'am," said an old man between laughing and crying, stumping towards her from the chimney corner, "here be's our Toby come back, that we gave up for dead, and I do be so glad, I can't tell 'ee."

"Toby? are you Toby?" said Miss Clairvaux turning short round on the clown.

"Toby Tumble-down Dick," answered

that eminent personage with a ducking bow, "come home to see old feyther."

"Why, Toby, you've gone near to break your father's heart. I'm ashamed of you. Is this manly conduct?"

"Oh law now, if you're going to talk serious, miss, I must wash off my paint—and chalk's expensive. I shall be all smeary if I begins to cry . . ." and here he pretended to whimper.

"Toby, you disgust me," said Miss Clairvaux. "Why have you come back to disgrace your poor old father's grey hairs?"

"*I* disgrace him?" "*He* disgrace me?" said they both together. "Why, dear ma'am," cried the old man, "he's brought me back a stocking full of money! only look!" and he shook and chinked it—"he's a kind heart, is Toby, and a dutiful fellow."

"Aye, aye, I know what's what," said Toby, spitting upon his hands, and then turning his head round as if it were loose

in the socket, "I'm a good boy, am I, like little Jack Horner. Make a back, father —"

"Stop, stop! what profanation!" interposed Miss Clairvaux, interposing her umbrella to prevent his leaping over the old man's head. Old Dick, meanwhile, who was toothless, half blind, and half silly, laughed childishly, and tottered back to his seat, chinking his money.

"Toby," said Miss Clairvaux sorrowfully, "how could you ever choose such a trade?"

"Well, miss, perhaps the trade chose me."

"Don't call me miss, I'm an old lady."

"Bless your heart, no, ma'am! you're —"

"Toby!—"

"Beg pardon, miss—you see, there must be some of all sorts—parsons is parsons, and clowns is clowns."

"I fear I must not expect you to talk rationally —"

"Quite past my abilities, miss. Buy a bill

of the play?" and out he pulled a dirty bill of the performances, and a handfull of tickets.

"O no, thank you—such things are quite out of my line."

"But won't you treat the young lady, ma'am?"

"Treat!" repeated Miss Clairvaux with supreme contempt. "You have curious ideas of treats, Toby."

"Well, perhaps I has, miss. I thought it would be a treat to bring that stocking-full of coppers to old father."

"That was kind of you, I admit. I give you credit for it."

"I wish the publicans would," said Toby, with a waggish wink at Eleanor.

"You had better confine your attention to ladies of your acquaintance, Toby."

"All in the way of business, ma'am. Perhaps the young lady will treat *you* —"

"Is that little boy yours?"

"He belongs to our troop, miss. He's an orphant, he is—child of the woman that was eat up by the lion."

"Sad! sad!—and you have adopted him?"

"For better, for worse, miss."

"For worse, I'm afraid. It is a shocking training for him."

"Why now, miss, how *can* I give him a better? I do for him what I do for myself; do all folks do as much?"

"They do not."

"No, miss, indeed they don't."

"Toby! show the ladies that trick—" feebly cried the old man. Miss Clairvaux went on.

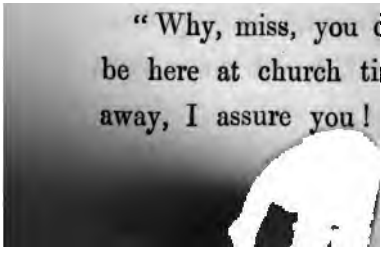
"It's a serious thing to undertake the charge of a child, Toby. He has a soul, you know. Come and talk to me to-morrow evening, Toby—I really can't say anything to you in all that paint, it upsets me. You don't look like a man, but an idol."

"Everybody says that's what I am," murmurs Toby, "but as for idle, it's just the other way, as you'd know if you'd cut a few somersets."

"Hush, no foolery!"

"What, not from a Tom fool? There now, don't ye look so hurted: I means no harm. You've done a power of good to old father, and I feel it, as sure as eggs is eggs. As you said, I give ye credit for it!"

"You will give me comfort, which is more to the purpose, if you will come to me to-morrow evening, or better still, to-morrow morning, with all that paint washed off, and have a quiet talk with me. It will be Sunday, so you cannot have any professional employment; and perhaps we may arrange some better life for your little boy, and even induce you to take him to church."



"Why, miss, you don't suppose we shall be here at church time to-morrow? miles away, I assure you! We shall get three or

four hours' rest after our performance to-night, and then pack up and cut away, hours before daylight. We're nuisances, we are, in daylight, of a Sunday. We must make ourselves scarce and keep out of sight, I can tell ye. Else good Christian people would wheel us to the edge of creation and pitch us over."

"Too sadly true, poor fellow, though it is your own fault—"

"Or misfortune," put in Toby.

"Well, we won't quarrel about a word."

"Nor about anything else, if my consent's asked," said the clown. "Law, you've made me so low-spirited, I could sit down and cry. (Somebody, give me a clean pocket-handkerchief). I know, now, this will cost me twopence, this talk, for I shall have to fetch two-pennorth of gin to get up my spirits for the evening entertaiment."

"Toby, forbear! Well, I wish you a good evening."

"Thanke'e, miss, I think we've a pretty fair prospect of one. We're very popular we are."

"I did not mean that. Good bye."

"Good bye, miss, and take a clown's blessing, if there be such a thing, cos you've been very kind to old father!"

"Could you have fancied it?" said Miss Clairvaux in deep disgust to Eleanor as they walked away.

"Certainly a clown in a cottage was the last thing I should have expected to see," said Eleanor laughing.

"Oh, my dear, it makes my heart ache. I did not feel in the least inclined to laugh. What a life his must be! All the fault of his parents, bringing him up as they did. There is not the least use in expecting any good of that family. They disappoint me at every turn. They have everybody's bad word, and yet many people have been very kind to them. The mother, as long as she was

alive, was what the Scotch call feckless. Easy, good-tempered, slatternly, letting everything go to rack and ruin. This Toby ran away a long time ago. People said it was the mother's fault, and yet were very kind to her during her long illness, and sent her everything she could want. Since her death, a married daughter, just such another, has come to look after the old man. I am sure I am tired of her children coming to me, and saying, 'mammy says can you give her an old pair of shoes?' They go with the same message to a dozen different houses, and pick up what they can. Regular *sorners*. Only fit for the Union, where soon or late, they will go!"

Miss Clairvaux next visited a detached cottage, nearer to her own house, and as great a contrast to the preceding, as if they had suggested the frontispiece to "Industry and Idleness." The Fords were very poor, but very tidy and thrifty. Mrs. Ford made

brown bread for Miss Clairvaux, who now paid her weekly bill, ordered a luncheon cake, and prescribed for her little girl's weak eyes. Here was a bedridden old grandmother, of sweet aspect, for whom Eleanor gladly undertook to knit a bed-rest.

In the course of the evening, Miss Clairvaux produced a large, thin, crumpled piece of paper, which she smoothed out, and then began to read aloud, commenting on it by the way.

"This is the rubbish that Toby is concerned in," said she, "and that our wise townspeople are running after, this evening, by way of preparation for the Sabbath. 'Signor Tribulini's Grand Cosmopolitan Circus, on a scale of splendour never before attempted in the world: including the finest stud of horses and ponies, and most talented troupe that ever appeared before a British public, who, for elegance, grace, action, attitude, equilibrium and ease, have

no competitors on this oblate spheroid! The Leopard Queen, in her allegorical chariot, with gorgeous, chaste, elaborate, and beautiful carving, and noble gold mountings, drawn by real leopards, will be arrayed in robes of state, suitable to the dignity of her office, and present a series of attitudinal tableaux, worthy the study of the most accomplished artists.' Poor girl! — did you ever hear such stuff? Then there are to be 'exciting scenes, and perilous feats on horseback, by stars of the profession; a troupe of performing camels'—What are they to perform? the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet? 'the whole enlivened by the fun, frolic, wit, and wisdom of the best clown of the day.' Toby Dick's wit and wisdom! we have had a sample of it this afternoon. 'In addition to which, Signor Tribulini will give some special artistic and cabalistic performances, worthy of that cosmopolitan

necromancer the Wizard of the North.' And then follows a list of patrons and patronesses of the troupe, beginning with her Majesty, and including Miss Nightingale, besides a host of 'the nobility, clergy, and gentry, too numerous to mention. The whole concern forming a rolling stock valued at twelve thousand pounds.' Very likely. Such an establishment must sink a good deal of money. And I don't suppose this Mr. Tribulini does more than pay his current expenses. In such a place as this, for instance, even if everybody went, clergy and all, it would amount to a very inconsiderable return. And then there are the wages of all these people to be paid, and the animals to be fed, and the ground to be hired—I cannot fancy that Mr. Tribulini will soon retire upon a fortune."

Eleanor sang and played, this evening, to Miss Clairvaux, who was much pleased to find

her a good musician; and afterwards they read aloud to one another till bed-time. It was a very pleasant, though quiet, evening.

At dead of night, Eleanor awoke suddenly, and without any drowsiness. She could not account for it; everything around seemed hushed and still. All at once, the little dog Fly gave a bark; she left her bed and went to her window to look out. Clouds were drifting over the moon, which gave a troubled, uncertain light. No one seemed stirring.

Suddenly Eleanor saw a bright gleam of light from a cottage, which rapidly became stronger and brighter—the cottage was on fire!

Eleanor flew to Miss Clairvaux's door, and loudly tapped, crying: "Miss Clairvaux! Miss Clairvaux! a cottage is on fire!"

"Dick's, ten to one!" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux, awake in an instant.

"I'll be with with you directly, my dear. Call the maids."

In an incredibly short time, the little household, hastily dressed, had assembled, and Miss Clairvaux despatched Claudia to rouse the Fords, while she herself sounded the alarm by ringing an immense hand-bell from her window. Eleanor, meanwhile, was hurriedly equipping herself to go out, and, directly she had done so, Miss Clairvaux begged her to ring the bell while she did the same. The flames, by this time, were fearful to behold, and scared figures were dimly seen running to and fro.

"No want of water, if there were but an engine," said Eleanor, as she and Miss Clairvaux hastened to the spot.

"The cottage will be burnt to the ground before the engine can be fetched," said Miss Clairvaux, "and in all probability the hose would be too short, or something would be out of order. Practical people we are—al-

ways ready for an emergency! Oh no, the cottage must come to the ground—let us only hope no lives may be lost —"

By this time the maid came running back. "They have roused the Dicks now, ma'am," said she excitedly, "and are going to take them in at Ford's."

"What, the old man?" said Miss Clairvaux. "Have they got him down out of the loft?"

They were now close to the first cottage, which was Ford's. Through the open door, they could see the old grandmother, sitting up in bed, and eagerly looking out. But others, nearer at hand, engaged their attention—Dick's married daughter, Martha White, with bare feet, a blanket dragged over her shoulders, and a baby in her arms, followed by two or three crying children.

"Come in, come in, my dear—give me the baby," the old woman was exclaiming, stretching out her arms.

"Martha, is your father safe?" said Miss Clairvaux.

"O yes, ma'am, by this time, I hope," said Martha crying, "there's plenty of men to look after him—my first duty is to the children. I don't suppose we shall save a rag —"

"The old man may be burnt, for any thought she will give him," said Miss Clairvaux, hastening on.

A little group of people were collected before the flaming cottage, at the upper window of which stood Toby, divested of paint, looking out.

"It's not for myself," he was saying, "that I should mind the leap—only with father on my back, and he so heavy—however, hold this blanket at the corners, four on ye. Hold hard—hold for your lives—hold for *ours*—now then —"

"Ah!" involuntarily screamed Miss Clairvaux as she saw the poor clown with his father on his shoulders, leap through the

air. Either the sudden weight was too great, or the men who held the blanket were awkward—two of the corners were dropped, and a loud cry was heard as the father and son fell.

"Dead! are they dead?" cried Miss Clairvaux, pressing forward.

"Not dead, but I think every bone in their bodies must be broke," said a man pale as ashes.

"You have lost your wits, all of you," said Miss Clairvaux. "Now, listen to me, and obey me. Toby is most hurt—leave him in the blanket and lift him in it, four of you, carefully, to my house. I shall be there sooner than you. Put the old man in this chair, and carry him, two of you, to ——. Have you room for him, Ford?"

"Well, ma'am, you see we've Martha and the children; but —"

"You cannot have him, it is plain. Well, take him to my house too. You boys who are

standing about, may make yourselves useful. Look sharp, now, gather up all that bedding, and run off with it to my kitchen. Joe Hatch, I've other work for you—run off to the town, to Mr. Burrowes—ring the night-bell, tell him of the fire and of the accident, and ask him to come over to me."

The boys instantly obeyed with alacrity.

"Please, ma'am," said one of the men respectfully, "I think it's hard you should have both the Dicks, and I believe the old man is more frighted than hurt. I'll take him along with me, if you will allow me."

"That's very kind of you, Thomas. Of course it will be very inconvenient to you. May I accept your offer?"

"O yes, indeed, ma'am, we shall do very well. Neighbours must be helpful."

"Very well, then so let it be. God bless your good heart, Thomas. Carry him, then, to your cottage."

And she hurried homeward, in the red light of the flaming cottage, which was now given up, without another effort, to destruction. As she passed Toby, lying motionless as a sack in the blanket, he piteously smiled at her and said:

"You're very kind, miss—I give ye credit for it—*and so will the Lord!*"

CHAPTER V.

Whenever I find a great deal of gratitude in a poor man, I take it for granted there would be as much generosity if he were a rich man.

ELEANOR had run forward, so that when the men arrived with their unfortunate burthen, the bed-clothes which had been sent in advance were already comfortably, though hastily, arranged in the back kitchen. Toby was deposited on them with the utmost gentleness; notwithstanding which, some unavoidable shock or inward hurt made him faint away. Miss Clairvaux could not have shewn more

tender solicitude for him, had he been her own brother; and when the men who had carried him had placed him as comfortably as they could, and seen him come to himself, they thankfully left him in his kind protectress's care.

She told Eleanor and the servants they might return to their beds. The latter gladly obeyed, but Eleanor assured her she much preferred sharing her watch, as she was sure she could not sleep. She established herself in the snug little kitchen, where Miss Clairvaux joined her; looking in on Toby from time to time.

The fire had by this time spent itself, and the cottage lay a smouldering heap of ruins. All the poor people seemed to have returned to their crowded homes, though dogs continued to bark.

"What is that lumbering noise?" said Miss Clairvaux. "Oh, the engine! Too late, of course, to be of any good. It may keep

the men in practice, to give the ruins a good drenching."

"I hear a horse coming up to the gate," said Eleanor. "The doctor, I hope."

Instead of the doctor, however, the visitor was a shabby-genteel man, who, with abundance of politeness announced himself as Mr. Tribulini, the manager of the circus, who had come to inquire after his clown.

"He is more dead than alive, I am afraid," said Miss Clairvaux. "You can see him if you like, but he has not spoken yet."

Mr. Tribulini followed her on his tip-toes, like a dancing-master, into the scullery, looking rather awe-stricken; but, as soon as he saw a feeble smile of recognition on Toby's face, he took his hand, and said cheerily.

"What! Othello, my fine fellow? your occupation's gone, hey? for the present?"

"I'm afraid it has, master," said Toby, huskily.

"Well, well, cheer up, and bear it like a man. Where do you feel hurt, hey?"

"Hurt all over, master, but chiefly in my back and one of my ancles."

"Hum! that's awkward. You won't be able to go forward with us this morning, Toby—"

"The idea!—" said Toby.

"No, my good fellow, you must remain behind awhile, Toby, and lay up till you get well. Then you can join us again. But I'll tell you what, Toby, I'll pay you a month's salary in advance, and I fancy that will be no bad plaster for your aching bones, hey?"

"Thanke'e, sir," said Toby, "but I'm afraid that won't go far to pay the doctor's bill."

"Oh, you won't want a doctor long. You must go into the infirmary."

"And what's to become of little Kett, sir?"

"Little Kett shall keep with us, he belongs to the troupe."

"He 'll be a regular good hand, sir, some of these days. If I die, I hope you'll purwide for him."

"Oh, who's talking of dying? never say die, my man!"

"If I don't say it, then, I believe I shall do it," groaned Toby.

Mr. Tribulini looked at Miss Clairvaux, raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is awkward for you, ma'am," said he, "very awkward."

"Master," said Toby, raising his voice, "the party you're addressing lives at the sign of the Old Angel. That's her name, and that's what she is."

"Here comes the doctor, Toby," said Miss Clairvaux, as Mr. Burrowes entered the scullery.

After exchanging a few friendly words with Miss Clairvaux, Mr. Burrowes, with the aid of Mr. Tribulini, and in spite of a good

deal of "oh, oh"-ing on Toby's part, which was partly professional, turned him over and over, poked him here and there, and finally made out that no bone was broken, but that his back was severely contused and his ancle dislocated; consequently he would be laid up for some weeks, and had better be removed the next day to the infirmary. After doing what was necessary for the ancle, and giving Miss Clairvaux a few general directions, he took leave, telling her he would take care the poor man should be carefully removed in the course of the morning. As soon as he was gone, (having given Eleanor an attentive look as he passed,) Mr. Tribulini stepped forward, and, putting money into the clown's hand, said:

"Well, Toby, my boy, the best friends must part. What must be must. Here's your tin, and much good may it do you. It does not appear a very bad case after all—you'll be after us in a month or six weeks, I've no

doubt. Mind, next time you play Eneas with Anchises on your back, you get the scene shifters to hold the blanket better. All in the day's work, old boy! give us your fist."

Toby literally obeyed orders, looking grim enough. However, he opened his fingers afterwards and gave Mr. Tribulini's a good squeeze.

"Give my love to the little 'un," said he. "I don't believe you'll get such a clown as I've been, just yet." And he shut his eyes, and turned them against the pillow to hide something like a tear. Mr. Tribulini gave another expressive look and shrug, and then, with a profusion of bows and polite speeches to Miss Clairvaux, withdrew.

"Toby," said she, when the manager was gone, "what shall I do with this money on the counterpane?"

"Oh! keep it for me, please, miss, till I ax you for it; or, if I don't, give it to poor father."

"I think he's hardly capable of taking care of money, Toby. He hardly knows shillings from pence."

"Oh, miss, I know that well enough. There were more coppers than shillings in the stocking—poor old fellow! And if he hadn't been sitting up in bed to count them, and let the candle fall among the straw, maybe the cottage wouldn't be burnt down. But, though 'twas his fault, and, mebby, he hadn't many days to live, I didn't like 'em to be cut shorter, 'specially by fire, for his old flesh and bones would feel it just as much as any."

"Just so. And if you have done yourself a serious hurt, you will always have consolation in reflecting how you came by it. I do not think, however, that you will die."

"No, ma'am, I hope not. But what in the world am I to do if I get well, and yet can't be a clown?"

"Why, there are thousands of better things

you can do. This accident may be a blessing in disguise to you, if you take it in a right spirit, which I have great hope you will do. And now, suppose you try to go to sleep."

"Isn't it Sunday morning?" says Toby.

"Well, I believe it must be, by this time."

"When I was a little boy, and used to go to church, the sand used to come in my eyes so at sermon time! Do 'ee read me a sermon, miss, if you've no objection, and I think I shall soon dot off."

"You're a curious fellow, Toby; and, I am afraid, are not actuated by a right motive. However, a word in season may take effect when little expected; and, at any rate, the reading you suggest can do you no harm, and perhaps may do good, so I will comply with your requset."

And she fetched a volume of Bishop Wilson's Sermons—the good old bishop of Sodor and Man; sending Eleanor to bed as she did

so. Then she adjusted her light, and commenced her reading in a lulling voice. In five minutes Toby was fast asleep. She then returned to her bed-room, leaving the door ajar, and lay down without undressing.

Rather late in the morning she awoke from heavy sleep, feeling strangely dreamy and unrefreshed.

"Who's there?" said she with a start.

"It is I," said Eleanor. "I hope you will forgive me for coming in, but as your door stood open, I could not help stealing in to see if you were asleep. How do you feel after all your fatigue and anxiety?"

"Oh! I am perfectly well, my dear, thank you, and shall get up directly. As soon as I have washed and dressed I shall feel quite right. And you, have you caught cold?"

"Oh no!"

"That's well."

"And Toby is going on nicely. The maids have given him a cup of tea, and when I saw

him just now, he told me he was 'as comfortable as a cow in clover.'"

"Cows must not have too much clover, though," said Miss Clairvaux laughing; "and we must take care not to kill Toby with kindness."

"'*Are* people ever killed in that way?' said Eleanor, as she retreated.

"Well, they may be coddled too much to be good for them. Whose voices are those?"

"Many people are passing the gate, going to look at the scene of the fire. There are several little groups scattered about."

"Ah! there are always plenty to gape and stare. If they had come when they were wanted, they could have formed a line, and passed buckets. I will soon be down, my dear."

When Miss Clairvaux visited her patient, she found him very anxious to know how "poor old faythe" was, so Eleanor offered to go and see. Church-going was out of the

question this morning; even supposing the church-paths to be not under water, it was already too late, and Eleanor made a virtue of necessity, by devoting herself to the good of her neighbours. The equestrian troop had long ago departed, but a shabby-looking hanger-on accosted Eleanor at the gate, with a humble request to know how Toby fared; having learnt which, he bowed, and hastened after his companions.

There were plenty of idlers and gapers, as Miss Clairvaux called them, standing about; and Eleanor was pleased to hear more than one group commenting on the kindness of Miss Clairvaux in taking the clown into her house, when, as was well known, she did not patronize the troop. It was "just like her," they said.

Eleanor thought there could hardly be a greater scene of disorder and discomfort than Thomas Ford's cottage presented; but the cheerful, kind-hearted people did not feel it

to be so themselves, though they were "put about" with their helpless guests, and with the strange miscellaneous collection of things that had been rescued from the fire, and brought in pell-mell. The old man seemed to have had his little sense shaken out of him by his fall—his eyes wandered about in the unsuccessful attempt to make out where he was, and he continually reiterated, "where's Toby? I want Toby," to which Mrs. Thomas Ford as constantly replied that, "poor Toby was a-bed, a resting his self," and officiously chinked for him his stocking full of halfpence, which he always resented.

Miss Clairvaux, meanwhile, found it a very difficult matter to get on with Toby, who, however he might have felt like a cow in clover on first waking, was now restless, discontented, and perverse, because she would not accede to his request that he might have just a thimble full of spirits. In fact, he was experiencing the wretched

craving for stimulants, which the habitual drinker always feels, the morning after a carouse.

"I cannot think of it, Toby," said Miss Clairvaux. "I have no spirits in the house, for I highly disapprove of them, and even if I had any, I should not give them to you while you are under medical treatment. So early in the morning, too!"

"That's the very thing," put in Toby, piteously, "it's very fatiguing to wake early of a morning—especially of a Sunday."

"Well, you shall have another nice cup of tea—"

"But tea's no good, unless it's laced with brandy."

"Fie, fie—now keep yourself quiet, Toby, and don't toss about so, and I'll read to you a little."

"O, miss, don't ye, or I can't stand it! I shall go crazy with those sixteenthlies and seventeenthlies!"

"You are very ungrateful, Toby, when they gave you such nice rest before."

"But I can't rest now, for I'm as hot as fire, with this lot of bed-clothes over me—it's what I've never been used to, feather beds and blankets above and below; and, begging your pardon, miss, I'm stifling. You mean it all very kind, I know; but I'm not used to dwell in marble halls (though this is only a scullery). Now, if you'll be ruled by me, miss, you'll send that 'ansome young lady as is gone to see faythe r, to look up an old woman to set me straight; for I can't dress myself, nor yet can you dress me; and yet if I remain a lying here, cry I must."

And whether he really cried, or only made believe, Miss Clairvaux could not tell.

"Oh, Toby, Toby," said she, remonstratingly, "now, don't go on like that. Here am I, doing everything I can think of for your comfort, and you cry like a

child because I will not give you something unfit for you, and which I have not to give."

"You—cou'—cou'—cou'—could get it . . . ub, ub, ub—a—boo . . . ."

"What! send one of my good young maids to a public-house on a Sunday? oh, fie! Now be good, Toby, be good and patient, and I will send for an old woman; only, don't expect her to be here in a moment, as if you were a little child, and could not bear to wait. Be good and patient, and you shall have an old woman."

At this moment, Eleanor opportunely arrived, with the acceptable news that Mr. Tobias Dick senior was as well as could be expected, and continued to derive much satisfaction from his stocking-full of halfpence. This brought a broad smile on his son's face, which was prolonged by Eleanor's observing what a source of pleasure it must

be to him to think he had saved the life of so aged a parent.

"Yes, if I'd been anything but a clown, they might ha' made a play of it," said he. "Poor old dad!" And he lay tranquilly enough, perhaps sketching out the play, till the desiderated old woman made her appearance.

"You're the gal for me," said he, directly he saw her. "Seventy, if you're a day. Now, handle me softly, I advise you. I can't stir, for my life: but I can bawl like a man calling sprats."

Into the hands of this much more appropriate nurse, Miss Clairvaux gladly resigned him. And when, in the afternoon, a spring-cart came to remove him to the infirmary, she felt relieved of a great responsibility. Toby was really grateful now, and his eyes shone with genuine tears as he bade her adieu. He was sorry, he said, to have been so fractious, but it had

quite put him out of countenance for the ladies to see him without his paint.

The only other event of the day was, to Miss Clairvaux's surprise, a kind message of inquiry about Toby from Mr. Newland the valetudinarian, brought by his staid old house-keeper, on her way to meeting.

CHAPTER VI.

The young Tobias was his father's joy.

"It must be terribly unwholesome," said Miss Clairvaux reflectively, "for that poor fellow to have all his pores filled up with chalk and red lead, and equally unwholesome to his mind to be filled up with such trash. Did you observe what he said about the world consisting, to them, of but two classes, professionals and public?"

"Perhaps this accident may be a blessing to him after all," said Eleanor, "if it obliges him to adopt another course of life."

"But what other course is he fit for? The city missionaries have turned many a greater offender to account; but when levity is the basis of a character, one may as well try to build on a shifting sand. Well, Eleanor, this is a broken Sunday, altogether different from what we have been accustomed to spend—I can certainly say so for myself. But next Sunday the water will have subsided sufficiently, I hope, for us to go to chnrch. This afternoon, we cannot do better, perhaps, than visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; and see what they most need. Very little of their wearing-apparel has been saved, probably; and though it was not much worth saving, it must be replaced."

They proceeded first to William Ford's cottage, within which, as Miss Clairvaux raised the latch, was audible a sustained, rather sing-song voice engaged in prayer. A tall, thin man in shabby black was on his knees, and all the family, including their

guests, knelt around him, except the old woman in bed, whose hands were reverently folded. Miss Clairvaux softly closed the door and went away.

"I could have found it in my heart," said she, "to go in and kneel down with them, though it is only Mr. Fawkes the Wesleyan; but it might have disturbed them. How nice of him to seek them out! That practicality in religion is what I like. No matter what the man may call himself, if he be a true Son of the Word, and about his Father's business."

They were now on their way to Thomas Ford's in the Green Lane, where old Dick was being sheltered.

"Of course, I am attached to my own church above others," continued Miss Clairvaux, "but very glad should I be if I found it always as prompt in good works as the — Dear me, here comes Dr. Hurst!"

And a neat, clerical-looking old gentleman

was seen picking his way towards them, or rather towards Thomas Ford's cottage. Directly he saw Miss Clairvaux, he raised his hat.

"Your errand is the same as mine, I know," said he heartily, "I might have been sure you would see to these poor people; but I thought I might as well just step over and look in upon them."

"You had a dirty walk, I'm afraid."

"Oh, shocking, shocking!" laughing and putting out his neat foot, which was not so very muddy after all. And so then they talked over the details of the fire, and went into the cottage, when Miss Clairvaux spoke in an under-tone to Mrs. Ford, while Dr. Hurst cheered up the old man, and put money into his hand. Eleanor, who stood apart, near the door, addressing herself to some clean, shy little children, heard most of what passed, and perceived that the good-natured doctor's words were

chiefly of a secular kind, without going much below the surface; but still, he had come at personal inconvenience, to show sympathy and generosity, and it was evident that his visit was prized by the cottagers. Afterwards he walked with Miss Clairvaux to her own gate, and told her he hoped he should see her in church next Sunday. Her maids had found their way there, morning and afternoon. She and Eleanor read to one another during the evening, and had a good deal of quiet talking on serious subjects; and the little domestic service was longer and more fervent than usual.

"You have never been in here, I think?" said Miss Clairvaux, next morning, as she unlocked the door of the room on the stairs.

"No," said Eleanor, "it is as great a secret to me as the Blue Chamber to Bluebeard's wife."

"Or 'the mysterious boudoir' to Belinda.

And, perhaps, you will be as much disappointed as she was."

She opened the door, and entered an uncarpetted room, full of lumber and rubbish, or what seemed so, with a large trunk in the middle of the floor, too full for the lid to close.

"This," said she, "is my grand repertory of things to give away; not 'unconsidered fragments,' but well-considered ones. You may come and help yourself to what you like. Somewhere near Damascus, there is a rubbish-heap of broken potsherds and so forth, which the natives call 'the Mother of Fragments.' I think it would be a very good name for this trunk, which it is my delight to fill with scraps in summer, and to empty in winter. But, though we are just through the winter, you see my stock is not exhausted, so you are welcome to whatever you think you can make most available for the Dicks."

Eleanor was quite in her element, contriving and piecing; and when she had been more than an hour at work, Miss Clairvaux came to beg her to go to William Ford's cottage, and desire one of the girls to come at one o'clock for a large meat-and-potato pie.

Eleanor found that the poor people's immediate wants had already been well cared for by Mr. Burrowes; but that it had been decided, as a matter of necessity, that old Dick, his daughter and grand-children, should go into "the house." She witnessed their removal with concern, but what could their poor neighbours do? They could shelter them for a night or two, but that was all, and, at present, there was no roof ready to receive them. The old man, in whom Eleanor chiefly took interest, was principally concerned with the jealous care of his stocking; but her heart felt heavy as she saw them depart.

On reaching the spot where the road had been under water, she saw, to her surprise and pleasure, that the water had disappeared, and several poor men were scraping the mud away, while Mr. Debenham was looking on.

He raised his hat to her, and was beginning, "Good morning, Miss—a—" when he remembered he did not know her name.

She smiled, and said, "This will be a good sight for Miss Clairvaux."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Debenham, "and, to tell the truth, it is chiefly on her account I am having it done. One hardly knows where to have her, sometimes. But such a heart!—and understanding, too, I may say. It's impossible, you know, not to admit her good points; and really, her conduct about the fire and the clown and all, has been something genuine, and ought to be considered. So, as I knew there was nothing she would like better than to have this job done, I set

it in hand. I've sometimes thought (when she's been a little hard upon us, you know,) that there is nothing she would like better than to be made inspector of nuisances."

Eleanor said she was sure Miss Clairvaux would appreciate his kindness in having the road made passable; and as she returned homeward, she wondered whether she would now pay the highway-rate.

Not small was Miss Clairvaux's elation at her report.

"Ah!" said she, "I knew what I was about. Not one halfpenny would I have paid if they had not come round; but now they shall have it directly. It is nearly one o'clock, so we cannot go before dinner, but we will do so in the afternoon. The days are now lengthening nicely."

In the afternoon, however, Miss Clairvaux had a succession of visitors from the town, who availed themselves of the improved highway to come and talk of the fire, and inquire

how she and the clown had got on together. The first of these was Miss Jones, who had scarcely seated herself with a look of complacency at the prospect of an uninterrupted chat, when she was sadly disappointed at Mrs. Plover's being announced. The Meadowleigh ladies were very fond of commanding undivided attention, and habitually looked on a second comer as an interloper, who destroyed the sacred freedom of a tête-à-tête; but on this special occasion, Miss Clairvaux was considered common property, and destined to hold a levée, whether with or without her own consent; therefore each assistant at it must be content with her share of the conversation, and find an equivalent for undivided attention in the privilege of trying to make something out of "the pretty girl in black," who had already been canvassed in private circles.

Eleanor was not sorry to have an opportunity of forming some opinion of the society of the neighbourhood, which was, in fact,

neither better nor worse than the average of small country towns, where the stock London subjects are somewhat at a discount, and public affairs, literature, exhibitions, and the arts, not so much as thought of. She looked rather hopelessly from the flat, inexpressive face of Miss Jones, to the fussy, shrewish features of Mrs. Plover, and then returned to the former, finding her the most promising of the two. Mrs. Rowe was next announced, and then ensued a feminine chattering, in which Eleanor's was the only voice unheard.

They were all very anxious to hear about Toby; but Miss Clairvaux was not one to make much out of little, and when asked what she had found him like, replied slightly, "Oh, like any other poor man," which was scarcely the case; and then turned the conversation to the subject of circus-people in general, the harm they did to others, and the harm others did to them. This was distasteful enough to her visitors, who had all attended

the performances; and Mrs. Plover said in a marked manner:

"I never set my foot in a theatre—have never been in one since I was married—at least, only once, but I own I think differently of horsemanship; and I chose to see what the amusements were that were provided for the commonality. The late hours, and the promiscuous admixture of classes, and so forth, were no doubt objectionable, and I should have no wish to go again, nor would I allow my servants to go on any account."

"Well, I sent my servants," said Mrs. Rowe.

"There, I think you took a hazardous step," said Mrs. Plover.

"Oh, I improved it afterwards to Hannah."

"Do tell us how you improved it—it might be useful to us to hear," said Mrs. Plover.

"Why, I said 'well, Hannah, what did you think of it all?' 'Oh, ma'am, I thought it was beautiful! I never knew how kings

and queens looked before!' 'Why, you don't suppose real kings and queens dress in that way? at least, since the time of the History of England.' 'Oh, ma'am, don't you think they can afford it?' 'Afford it? why, the Leopard Queen's rose-coloured train was only cotton velvet, and—'"

"Silk velvet, I assure you!" interposed Miss Jones, with some earnestness.

"Well, I said cotton, for I thought it was, 'cotton-velvet, and her pearls were false, and her colour too. Why, Queen Victoria would disdain to dress in that way.' 'Well, ma'am, if I were Queen Victoria, I should like to dress in that way every day.' 'Then it's very fortunate you are not. What! and be drawn about by wild beasts, with a clown walking alongside of you? Oh, Hannah, I'm quite ashamed of you! and then, after perambulating the town, and being stared at by the rabble, to go back to a bread-and-cheese supper, and to sleep in a tent.' 'Please,

ma'am, Abraham and Sarah slept in a tent.' 'Oh, Hannah!' (drawing herself up with great dignity) 'if you have got to Abraham and Sarah, I have done with you!'"

"Time enough, too, I think," said Mrs. Plover. "You set her down very properly. I looked upon the equestrianism in the light of science. But Mr. Tribulini's charlatanry bordered on the offensive."

"Dear now, I thought it the best of all," said Miss Jones.

"My dear Miss Jones! What! when he came forward and actually offered to eat a man alive! any man who would let him!"

"He might be quite sure," said Miss Clairvaux, laughing, "that at the first bite, the man would cease to be a consenting party."

"Just so," said Mrs. Rowe. "Hodge Ablett, stupid fellow, stood forward and said, 'oh well, you may try upon me!' and directly Mr. Tribulini began on his little

finger, he roared out as if he were killed. Mr Tribulini appealed to us all with 'a pretty fellow this, ladies and gentlemen, to fancy he can bear being eaten alive, when he roars out at the first bite!' and Hodge slunk away, finely laughed at, of course."

"There's a Hodge in every town, I dare say," said Miss Clairvaux.

'Doubtless the pleasure is as great
In being cheated as to cheat.'"

"There was no cheating in it," said Mrs. Plover.

"Oh no, a mere trick, and a poor one, I think. These poor charlatans work hard enough, generally, in getting up their feats for our amusement. What is sport to us, is sometimes death to them; always severe toil. Robert Houdin, even while eating his dinner at a chop-house, would use his spoon with one hand while exercising the other with a cup and ball in his pocket; and, as he walked

along the streets, both his hands would be at work under the folds of his loose coat. If the same continuous practice had been to some useful end, how much better for himself and for others!"

"Ah, we must have amusement of some sort," said Mrs. Plover.

"And really," said Miss Clairvaux, "I cannot think a play of Shakespeare's less edifying than Mr. Tribulini's charlatanry."

"There we differ, there we differ. I have nothing to say to the drama."

"We *cannot* have anything to say to it here. I was only drawing a comparison."

"Ah well, if you had been there, I don't think you would have seen anything to object to," said Mrs. Plover. "Except the Leopard Queen."

"That girl will be eaten up by the leopards some day," said Miss Clairvaux.

"Do you know," said Miss Jones, "I am not quite sure they are real leopards."

This occasioned a good deal of laughing. and various conjectures as to what they were, if not real leopards—whether boys or donkeys, &c.

"You know," said Miss Jones, "if they were leopards, they must be fed on meat. Now, I have been unable to learn that any butcher in Meadowleigh supplied the company with offal."

"Have you enquired?'

"I have."

A pause ensued. Then Mrs. Rowe said:

"So Mr. Swain's house is let at last."

"Yes, to a Mrs Gwyther."

"Do you know anything of her?"

"No—I understand Mrs. wain said she was not a person we should be likely to care to visit."

"Dear me, that's singular," cried Mrs. Plover. "What can be peculiar in her?"

"I don't know that there is anything peculiar."

"But, to set her apart from us in that marked way!—Who did Mrs. Swain say so to?"

"To Mrs. Hurst, I understand," said Mrs. Rowe.

Mrs. Plover reflected for a moment, and said.

"Then it must be about her religious opinions. I dare say she is a Dissenter."

Miss Clairvaux uttered a deprecatory "Oh!"—

"Well, we shall see. If she does not go to church, I shall set her down for a Dissenter. Very likely a Plymouth brethren."

"I suppose we ought not to call on her, in that case?" said Miss Jones, in timid appeal to Miss Clairvaux.

"The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," said Miss Clairvaux.

"I am not a Jew, I believe," said Mrs. Plover, "and still less a Samaritan; but yet, in the case supposed, I certainly think we

ought to unite in withholding from her the least conntenance."

"That will show her our superior charity as church-women," said Miss Clairvaux.

"Do you mean to call on her?"

"I have had no thought on the subject; but, perhaps, I may if I think her hardly used by every one else."

"Oh, Miss Clairvaux!"

"It is as well there should be some good Samaritan in Meadowleigh. But I live so far out of the town, that there is no reason why I should call on every new comer; and if you will be neighbourly to her, I shall be very well pleased to be released."

"Oh! I shall not be neighbourly to her," said Mrs. Plover, "we can't afford any contamination in a small place like this."

"Contamination? no," said Miss Clairvaux; "but I hope it won't amount to that. My father used to say, that there is nothing wanting to make all sensible and disinterested

people of one religion, than that they should talk together every day. However that may be, we do not even know that this lady is a Dissenter."

"I shall make it a duty to ascertain," said Mrs. Plover.

"You *must* make it one then," said Miss Clairvaux laughing, "for it is not one already."

A fresh party of visitors being announced Mrs. Plover and Miss Jones made way for them; but as Miss Jones held Miss Clairvaux's hand an instant, she said very insinuatingly—

"If you *should* see the clown again, I do wish you would ascertain about the leopards!"

"Oh, very well," said Miss Clairvaux smiling.

Afterwards, when they were left together, Miss Clairvaux said to Eleanor—

"I hope I am sincerely thankful for my belief in those doctrines which make the

distinctive difference between my creed and others; but I have known excellent persons of various, I may almost say of all persuasions, and I cannot bear anything like intolerance."

"Of course," resumed she after a pause, "everything must be taken with limitations. There is a species of liberality which amounts to indifference; and is not so much consideration for our neighbour's opinions as want of value for our own. Again, there is a good old saying, 'tell me your companions, and I'll tell you what you are.' If I chose my companions, as a matter of preference, out of the Romish Church, for instance, it might give very good colour to the belief that I leant towards Romanism myself. If I sought out Methodists *as* Methodists, it might reasonably be thought I was favourably inclined to Methodism. But this is different from shutting the door in the face of one's neighbour, because he, or she, goes

to chapel instead of church. At any rate, I am too old to take the infection, just as I have outgrowu the age when one is liable to measles and hooping-cough. Well said John Foster, 'that when the springtide of universal love shall rise sufficiently high, it will merge all rocks of offence, and minor lines of separation.'"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Plover was saying to Miss Jones, as they walked down the lane which connected the common with the town—

"It is easy to see that though Miss Clairvaux can be so Pharisaical with regard to the equestrians, yet she is sadly lax in her religious opinions; almost a free-thinker, I am afraid."

"Dear, do you think so?" said Miss Jones simply. "It would make me quite uncomfortable if I thought her anything of the kind."

The highway-rate was not paid that day,

but the next; and Eleanor had then her first opportunity of seeing what a clean, cheerful, quaint little town Meadowleigh was. The picturesque intricacy of outline in the projecting windows and ornamented gables of the houses, hardly any two of them of the same elevation, or of uniform materials, delighted her eye, early trained to the study of art. The shop fronts, on the other hand, with their small panes of glass, and narrow doorways, looked rather mean to a Londoner; and when she accompanied Miss Clairvaux into some of them, she noted the absence of metropolitan despatch and adroitness. She observed that the tradespeople and their customers seemed to know something of each other, and to be in the habit of exchanging kind speeches and civilities; also, time was a less precious commodity than in the capital, judging by the way in which it was expended in doing up a small

parcel in too diminutive a paper, or trying to tie it up with too short a piece of string. She heard a chemist desire a boy to bring back the pill-box he put into his hand, when he came for more pills; and she heard a draper offer a farmer's wife plain cake and currant wine, on the ground of her having laid out a sovereign in house-linen. She also observed that scarcely any shop confined itself to its own particular line of business; but that the pastry-cook sold Horniman's tea, the greengrocer toys, the straw bonnet-maker cigars, the watchmaker photographs, and the chemist silver brooches.

As they were leaving Meadowleigh, Miss Clairvaux said, "We may as well call on Mrs. Debenham;" and led the way up a handsome flight of stone steps to the door of a most respectable-looking red brick mansion. They were admitted into a square hall with richly painted and moulded ceiling, and shown up a polished oaken staircase into a small but

very lofty drawing-room, crowded with old-fashioned furniture in a high state of preservation. Eleanor noticed a spectacle-case, and The whole Duty of Man on the table, a large white cat on the rug, and a green parrot in an open cage.

The parrot had just inquired whether they liked sprats, and informed them that he did not, when a placid-looking old lady entered, in violet silk, with a black lace shawl, whom Eleanor at once decided must be Mr. Debenham's mother, not his wife; and so it proved.

"My bird is amusing you, I see," said she. "I assure you I find him a very good companion. Come, Polly, sing us a song."

"Polly likes walnuts," said the parrot.

"That's true enough, Polly, and you shall have one presently; but you must sing first."

Polly did not approve of the arrangement, however, and remained quite quiet; but

presently, when least expected, burst out with

"I'd be a butterfly, born in a bower!"

"Good Polly, good bird!" said Mrs. Debenham laughing; and she redeemed her word by giving him a split walnut, which she said would occupy him a full hour.

Presently Mr. Debenham came in, looking very brisk and good-humoured, as usual; and, after greeting the ladies, whom he appeared pleased to see, he said, cheerfully:

"Well, Miss Clairvaux, I hope I have got into your good books."

"What, by giving up the Browbeater?" said Miss Clairvaux.

"I'd forgotten all about the Browbeater! No, I meant about the road."

"Oh, yes, and I have paid my highway-rate."

"Oh, well, I'm glad to hear it," said he,

looking relieved. "It's no good standing out about things."

"No good standing out about things?" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux. "I don't admit that at all. If I had not stood out about the road, you would not have scraped it."

"Ah! well, we're both out of the scrape now, so let bygones be bygones."

And smiling, he turned to Eleanor, and asked if this were her first visit to Meadowleigh, to which she replied in the affirmative.

"Are you going to make a lengthened stay here?"

"I hardly know," replied she, rather embarrassed. "I hope so."

"I hope so, too; because you don't see the neighbourhood to advantage at this time of year. I think you would admire it in the summer, when the leaves are out. But, perhaps, you will have run away from us before then?"

"I really can't tell," said Eleanor.

"Mr. Debenham, I have a favour to ask of you," said Miss Clairvaux.

"Anything in my power, I am sure —"

"I want you to get me an order to see the Union."

"Oh, I've nothing to do with it."

"But who has?"

"Oh, any of the magistrates—Mr. Cole."

"Well, would you ask Mr. Cole?"

"Well—a— Would it not come better from yourself?"

"Why, I asked it of you as a favour, and you said you would do anything in your power!"

"Just so, only I did not know what it was."

"Is it so hard a matter, then, to obtain access to the Union? It ought not to be."

"Certainly not. O no, I don't suppose there is any difficulty. They admit the inmates' relatives one day in every week. Wednesday, I think it is."

"Then you think they would admit me?"

"Well, you see, you're not a relative."

"What difference does that make?"

"They would want to know your motive."

"My motive is to see the people inside."

"Well, I fancy they are rather shy of admitting strangers."

"Why should they be?"

"Because they might interfere."

"Why should they, if there is nothing to interfere about?"

"Ah! *if* is a ticklish word."

"Then you think I should be refused admittance."

"O dear, no!—not with an order."

"Then, can I prevail on you to get me one?"

"Certainly I will try, if you particularly wish it. Is there any one you especially want to see?"

"Yes, the Dicks."

"Ah, I heard Mr. Cole speaking of them

this very day. He said it was quite the best place for them."

"Has he seen them there?"

"Oh, yes. The old man had been a good deal put out, at being obliged to have a bath."

"Dear me, I can easily suppose that," said Miss Clairvaux, perturbed. "A compulsory bath must be a very different thing from one as we should take it, with every appliance of comfort. At his time of life, it might not even be a good thing for him—at any rate, it doubtless was a great shock. Poor old fellow! Well then, I'll rely on your getting me the order. You see, I don't know Mr. Cole, so I cannot so well ask him, or I would not trouble you."

"Don't you know Cole? I'm surprised to hear that. You're sure to find him at every snug little dinner-party. He's very fond of a game at whist."

"You know I never go to parties, or touch cards."

"No, you must find the winter evenings rather long."

"Never too long, or rarely so. When I do, it is because I am tired, and then I go to bed. Well then, you promise me the order —will you get it to-day?"

"To-day! that's very quick!"

"Why, to-morrow is Wednesday."

"O, ho, ho!—what celerity in everything! Well, well, I'll see if it can be done."

CHAPTER VII.

Theirs is yon house that holds the parish poor.

* * * * *

Dejected widows with unheeded tears
And crippled age with more than childhood fears.

CRABBE.

"I CANNOT get that bath out of my head," exclaimed Miss Clairvaux as they walked home. "I wish I could have had it for him. I am as fond of cold water as most; but there are ways of doing things. When he had lived so many years without one, why should he have it now? 'Because he was

dirty?' Pooh, pooh. Was he so much dirtier on Monday than he was on Saturday? Have *you*, Mr. Particular, had a bath this morning?"

Then, after a few minutes of troubled silence, during which she was doubtless carrying on an imaginary dialogue with some Jack-in-office, she resumed.

"It's all very well to give reasons, but the rich have no right to be such torments to the poor. What right does your money give you to infringe on their personal liberties, their sense of fitness and decency? Suppose you happened never to have had a total immersion yourself (I'll answer for it your grandfather never had, unless he fell overboard, and yet he was accounted clean in his day, I'll warrant him!)—suppose it, I say; how should you like your first experiment of the kind to be at the age of eighty, without your own consent, and with various humiliating, and even alarming circumstances? Would you, I say?

And is there any reason it should take place, merely because your house was burnt down on Saturday? A curious consolation! a curious compensation! .... Oh, Eleanor! what strange ideas some people have of doing good!"

Not to dwell any more on too painful a subject, she changed it somewhat abruptly.

"Well, and what do you think of the Debenhams?"

"I was surprised," said Eleanor, "to find Mrs. Debenham was Mr. Debenham's mother, not his wife. Has he, then, never married?"

"Oh, my dear, he lost his wife, a very nice little woman, about two years ago. His children are at school—two very promising little boys. Some people are surprised he does not marry again."

"That would be no great proof of love to his first wife," said Eleanor. "I am sure mamma would not."

Miss Clairvaux smiled, and said, "there is some difference of age, probably, between them."

"Mamma is but forty-three, and I should think that Mr. Debenham must be that or more," said Eleanor. "Certainly not a young man."

"I doubt if he considers himself an old one."

"Every one else must, though."

"Oh no, my dear Eleanor! most people would think him quite in the prime of life."

"Would they?" said Eleanor, incredulously.

"You do not, it is clear," said Miss Clairvaux laughing. "Here comes Mr. Burrowes. We shall hear how Toby is getting on."

Mr. Burrowes gave a satisfactory report of Toby, who was doing well, though his recovery would be slow. He found time hang rather heavily on hand, however; and had said, "you haven't such a thing, sir, as an old playbill about you, have you?"

"Think of that, now!" said Miss Clairvaux. "Poor fellow!" and, during the remainder of her walk, she ruminated on some way of amusing him.

Next morning, while Eleanor was drawing, Mr. Debenham came in, and said he had brought the order for Miss Clairvaux's admission to the Union. Eleanor was going to summon her, when he hastily said:

"Pray don't, Miss—a— (how ridiculous that I don't know your name), but the fact is, I'm in a hurry, and would rather not see Miss Clairvaux this morning. I had tremendous work to get this order from old Cole, who is a fretting, fumy sort of old fellow, very suspicious and jealous of interference, and he asked me no end of questions, why she wanted to go, and what she meant to do there, which I knew not how in the world to answer. Uncommonly tiresome habit some people have of asking impertinent questions, Miss Foljambe—"

"My name is not Foljambe," said Eleanor quietly, but scarcely suppressing a smile.

"Ten thousand pardons—my memory is so treacherous! I know I must have heard your name a hundred times, but just now it has quite escaped me. Oh! now, to be sure, I have it. Hunter! Miss Hunter!"

"No, indeed," said Eleanor, now quite laughing.

"No? Then ten thousand more pardons! and, if it be not an impertinent question, what *is* your name?"

"But suppose it should be," said Eleanor.

"Oh, then the world's at an end! good morning." And he was snatching up his hat, when she quietly said:

"You are quite welcome to know my name. It is Graydon."

"Graydon! Ten thousand thanks. I shall never forget it again, Miss Graydon."

"You have not forgotten it now, for I do not think you have ever heard it before."

"Well, perhaps not; but, at any rate, I will not forget it now. Is this your drawing? Beautiful, beautiful! Good morning! My compliments to Miss Clairvaux."

And as he hurried through the hall, he caugh at glimpse of Miss Clairvaux, for Eleanor heard him cry,

"Good morning, good morning! I am in a monstrous hurry; but I've left the order with Miss Graydon."

"What makes the man in such a flurry?" said Miss Clairvaux, coming into the parlour. "He seems quite ready with your name. Oh, here's the order—what a scrawl! Well, Eleanor, I shall leave you to your own devices, for it won't admit two."

If the truth be told, this was no unpleasant hearing to Eleanor, dearly as she already loved Miss Clairvaux. Who does not know the satisfaction of being occasionally left to one's own devices? to feel that the room, the house, is theirs for the nonce, with

leisure and liberty to follow out some cherished scheme—read some tempting book, for instance, or try to write one—finish some special birth-day present, practice a song or sonata, &c., &c.

Eleanor's desire was to write a long, long letter to her mother, comprising minute details of the fire, and all thereunto appertaining; and this she resolved to do in the most luxurious way. As soon, therefore, as Miss Clairvaux had started for the Union, which was nearly two miles off, she made up the fire, swept the hearth, set the chairs in their places, smoothed the anti-macassars, arranged everything in the most perfect order, and then seated herself in state. She was particular about her pen, her ink, her paper, and determined her mamma should see her very best writing.

Having commenced with this excessive deliberation, she proceeded pian'-piano, gradually accelerating her speed, till it became that

of the express-train. She would not mind two stamps, this time; it should be a regular budget, and give her mother a full half-hour's reading. So she sped away, not insensible to the warmth, and comfort, and stillness around her; as thoroughly enjoying her position and her employment as heart could wish. At length she came to a pause.

At this instant, though there had been no ring at the door-bell, she heard an unknown male voice in the hall, which made her start. Immediately after, she heard Claudia, who was cleaning the brass handle of the house-door, say in a half-frightened voice,

"She's not at home, sir."

"Ho!" (in a dissatisfied tone.) "When will she be in?"

"I don't know, sir."

"How has the old lady been going on lately?"

Clau. (in the same half-frightened tone.) "I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Humph! You don't seem very bright. Here's something that may sharpen your wits."

"What's it for, sir?"

"What's it for? That's a good one! Why, for a present."

"Thank you, sir; but I don't want one. I'd a great deal rather not take it, sir."

"Why, what a ninny you must be! Six to one and half-a-dozen to the other. Here, come along; I want to talk to you. Come in here."

Saying which, the speaker abruptly pushed open the door of the room in which Eleanor was sitting, and, the moment he saw her, stood transfixed. Saying in an embarrassed manner, quite different from his late effrontery,

"I didn't know there was anyone here—" he stumbled into the hall again, dragging the door after him, which, however, did not shut quite close, by reason of the door-weight

being pulled between it and the door-post. In a stifled whisper, he said,

"Is that a visitor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Staying in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who is she?"

"Miss Graydon, sir."

"Who's Miss Graydon?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Has she been here long?"

"Some little time, sir."

"How long is she going to stay?"

"I can't tell, sir."

"Humph! plaguy awkward. Well, I don't know that I shall wait. You needn't tell Miss Clairvaux that I've been here. Shall you?"

"O yes, sir."

"You *will*, you minx? Hang it, then I think I'll stay."

Eleanor shrank from his re-appearance, and

felt uncomfortable and alarmed. He went on.

"What have you got in the house to eat? Any cold meat?"

"I don't think there's anything, sir."

"Why, what are you going to have for dinner?"

"The butcher has not brought the meat yet, sir."

"Not brought the meat! Why, what o'clock are you going to dine?"

"My mistress said she should be out some time, and would dine whenever she came home, sir."

"Ho! then I shall have some bread and cheese in the kitchen."

"The chimney-sweep's there, sir."

"My senses! Well; it's all of a piece. You're a nice young woman, I don't think. Tell your mistress I said so."

No answer.

The next minute, to Eleanor's inexpressi-

ble relief, she heard his boots grating on the gravel, followed by a slam of the gate. She went into the hall, where Claudia stood, looking very glum.

"Claudia," said she, "who was that?"

"Mr. Horsefield, miss."

"I am glad he is gone."

"I'm sure, so am I, miss!"

"Do you think Miss Clairvaux will be sorry he did not stay?"

"O no, miss, I'm sure she won't!"

"I am so glad you told him you should tell her he had been here! It was very wrong of him to wish you to conceal it."

"Oh, I wasn't a going to mind such as *he*," said Claudia scornfully, and renewing her scrubbing *con brio*.

"Who is Mr. Horsefield?" said Eleanor.

"Oh, he belongs, somehow, to Mr. Foljambe," said Claudia, without intermitting her scrubbing.

Eleanor longed to add, "who is Mr. Fol-

jambe?" but thought it might be an impertinent question. She had no right to learn Miss Clairvaux's affairs through her servants.

Mr. Horsefield had something the air, she thought, of a low attorney's clerk. His face and figure seemed stereotyped on her memory. She could not resume the thread of her letter, her mind was too much pre-occupied; and as it was a long one already, she wound it up.

When she had done this, she observed it was raining fast. She feared Miss Clairvaux would get wet, and went to the window to watch for her; feeling the time pass rather slowly. She had to wait a good while. Directly she saw her coming, she ran to open the door, and relieve her of her wet umbrella. Then, while Claudia went for her slippers, she took her wet cloak from her shoulders; in doing which, she observed that her eyes were red with crying.

"Thank you, that will do very well," said Miss Clairvaux in a dejected tone, as Claudia officiously shook and wiped her dress. "You may bring up dinner." Then, entering the parlour, and noticing the cheerful blaze, "really," said she, "it makes one repeat the little hymn we say so mechanically when children —

"Whene'er I take my walks abroad,
How many poor I see!
What shall I render to my God
For all He gives to me?"

Here she gave a deep sigh; but went on:

"Not more than others I deserve,
Yet He hath given me more,
For I have food while others starve,
Or beg from door to door."

(Here a dolorous shake of the head; and then, in a still more doleful voice):

"How many children in the street
Half naked I behold,

While I am clothed from head to feet,
And covered from the cold!"

"Ah!—" and with her feet on the fender, she heaved another deep sigh.

"I fear your expedition has not been a very cheering one," said Eleanor.

"Cheering, my dear? The idea!—of anything cheering in a Union! Of all the melancholy places!—There ought to be a special clause for it in the Litany. 'From all Workhouses and Unions, good Lord, deliver us!'"

"What was it that so particularly grieved you?" said Eleanor, sympathetically.

"My dear, everything grieved me. In the first place, the building itself, a great, unsightly mass of red brick, without a tree or a flower near it—only a square plot of cabbages and onions—was enough to give one the horrors. When I reached the door, I was received by a decent-enough looking elderly woman, who, when my order had been

examined, civilly undertook to show me her part of the house. She began with the ward containing the vicious, refractory girls, who overwhelmed us with abuse, but when I spoke gently to one of them, she threw her apron over her head, and burst out crying. It was almost less sad to visit the imbecile and epileptic inmates, though that was repelling enough.

"Then we got among the married women, where Dick's daughter was; separated from her children! Poor thing, she looked subdued enough; and a tear came into her eye when she saw me. She said it was hard to be parted from her ba—" (Here Miss Clairvaux's voice was quenched.) "As for Jane, her daughter of fourteen, she was turned among such a set of girls as looked fit to corrupt a saint.

"O dear me! Then we went into a room full of babies. Quiet as lambs, poor little dears! *very* good, but not one of them smiling!

I chirrupped to them, and poked their cheeks, but they did not seem to know how to take it. Then we saw the old women's ward. Not a speck on the floor, which was freshly scoured; but oh, so damp and chill for the poor, rheumatic old bodies, each seated on her own bed!

"Then my guide told me she had shewn me all; but I said I wanted to see the men; so she turned me over to another conductor. I begged to see Toby, so I was taken into the infirmary. Here, I must tell you, I was very much pleased. Toby is popular, and is being very well looked after. He was very anxious to know how his father was. I told him I was going to see him after I left the infirmary, and he begged me to return and give him my report of him, which I only promised conditionally, telling him I might not have time; and it was well I said so. Poor old—"

Here Miss Clairvaux's voice quavered, but she hemmed and went on steadily.

"The poor old man was in a room with many others, and lying outside his bed. He was all in a tremble. At first, I did not think it was him. He has shrunk to nothing. I could easily have lifted him. He was crying in a weak sort of way, without any tears, his poor old features working, and did not seem to know me when I spoke to him. He only kept repeating, 'they've taken away my stocking!' 'No, Dick,' I said, 'they have not! you have both your stockings on.' He looked about him for a moment, and then relapsed, saying 'no, no, I don't mean them—they've taken away my stocking—Toby's stocking.' I then remembered the stocking full of halfpence, and—"

"Dinner's on table, ma'am," said Claudia.

"I can't come," said Miss Clairvaux, vindictively; on which Claudia, snubbed, withdrew. "So then," resumed she, more mildly. "I said, pacifyingly, 'O, have they? I dare say it was only to take care of it. I'll see

about it.' 'Will you though?' said he, sitting up suddenly, and looking hard at me. 'Yes, yes,' said I, 'depend upon it I will.' 'Why, you're Miss Clairvaux, I do declare,' said he, 'that used to be so kind to me. How ever did you get in here?' 'Why, on purpose to see you and Toby, to be sure,' said I; 'that and nothing else. Why, how cold you are, my poor man,' laying my hand on his, which quite chilled me through. 'It's the bath,' said he, and an awful look came over his face. 'The bath?' repeated I, 'why, that can't chill you now—it was two days ago.' 'O, was it, though!' said he, with the same fearful look. 'I had it again this morning, cold as ice, for a punishment, 'cause I cried for the stocking,' and he burst out again. O, Eleanor, the dry sobbing of old people who have no tears!—"

Her own flowed again. "So I took the gold out of my purse," she went on, "and left in it a little silver and some halfpence,

and slipped it into his hand, whispering, 'there, there, keep that.' Quick as thought, he hid it out of sight, with a look of intelligence that was painful to behold. 'You're a good lady,' said he, 'always was.' 'Pray to God, Dick,' said I, 'you remember your prayers, don't you? Pray to God!' 'I can remember 'our Father,' said he. 'That's it,' said I, 'say 'our Father,' whenever you can, day and night. Good-bye,' and stooping down over him, I kissed him."

They both sighed.

"How unfit I should be to live in what is called the world!" said Miss Clairvaux, after a pause. "Its pleasures would be nothing to me, and it would call my pains exaggerated. I just do to be where I am, as you may say of many a scrubby tree in a copse, that would never bear to be planted in full sight."

CHAPTER VIII.

Happy those early days, when I
Shone in mine angel infancy!
Oh! how I long to travel back
And tread again that ancient track!

HENRY VAUGHAN.

AND then they went to dinner, which luckily was a cold one. When Eleanor saw the sirloin, garnished with parsley, it suddenly struck her that Claudia the blue-eyed had told Mr. Horsefield a direct untruth in saying there was nothing in the house. She thought she would defer mentioning his visit

till Miss Clairvaux had recruited herself by eating; and though it might sound better to say Miss Clairvaux had lost every vestige of appetite, yet this would not be the fact, for crying and walking had made her hungry. So she ate, and was the better for it. While Claudia was setting on the pudding, Miss Clairvaux had leisure to think of the home department, and said:

"Has anybody called while I was out?"

"Only Mr. Horsefield, ma'am."

"Mr. Horsefield?" repeated Miss Clairvaux, with surprise and dissatisfaction. "What brought him here?"

"He came by rail, ma'am, I suppose."

"Of course, but what did he come for? something disagreeable no doubt. Did he leave any message?"

"No, ma'am?"

"Did he come in?"

"Only into the hall, ma'am. Leastways, he stepped into the parlour of his own accord,

but directly he saw Miss Graydon he stepped out again."

"Ill-bred fellow. Just like him. Did he say anything to you, Eleanor?"

"Not a word," said Eleanor.

"Well, I am glad he came when I was out, for I had no wish to see him. Probably he will not come for some time again."

"If he should, what had we better say, if you are out?" said Eleanor.

"Oh, merely that I am not at home. There is no occasion to ask him in. Claudia should not have done so, to-day."

"I didn't, ma'am!" said Claudia, "I was cleaning the hall, and had left the door open, just the least moment, when in he walked."

"Ah, that was very unguarded of you, Claudia. He might have been a thief. Many people have had their cloaks and umbrellas walked off with, owing to the door having been left open just the least moment."

"It wasn't open—only ajar," said Claudia.

"You put me in mind of the riddle, Claudia. When is a door not a door? When it's a jar."

As this old witticism happened to be new to Claudia, she dimpled with smiles.

"He wanted some cold meat," said she presently.

"Cold meat!" echoed Miss Clairvaux indignantly. "I admire his impertinence!"

"I told him there was none," said Claudia with complacence.

"There, you did wrong, Claudia. There was plenty, but there was no need to invite him to it. You had no right to do so."

"He invited his self," said Claudia, "so what could I say, ma'am?"

"You could say that you were not at liberty, in your mistress's absence, to offer him any refreshment," said Miss Clairvaux with dignity.

"So I will then, next time," said Clandia.

"Which I hope will be long coming,"

said Miss Clairvaux. Whereat, they all smiled.

After dinner, Miss Clairvaux established herself in her easy chair, and looked dreamily into the fire. Eleanor offered to read to her.

"No, thank you, my dear, it is almost too dark for you to see, and besides, my attention would be divided. I cannot help dwelling on the Union. I think I shall write a letter to the Times, when the lamp is lighted—a letter in the style of S. G. O."

"That will be excellent," said Eleanor, "but, in the meanwhile, would it not be best to divert your mind a little from so painful a subject? I can read very well by fire-light."

"Reading by fire-light is very prejudicial to the eyes. Besides, I want to think of Mr. Horsefield's visit. What could he want?"

"He wanted to see you."

"Yes, but what about? Did Mr. Foljambe send him, I wonder?"

She relapsed into silence, till Eleanor ventured to say,

"I suppose Mr. Foljambe is your lawyer?"

"Not my lawyer, though a lawyer," said Miss Clairvaux, rousing herself. "He is all for himself, and not at all for me. A selfish heart! and always was."

"You see, Eleanor," resumed she presently, so suddenly as to make her start, "the position we are in, with regard to each other, is this: A Mr. Foljambe was attached, early in life, to my mother, who, however, preferred my father, and married him. I was their only child. My father was a clergyman; I have no recollection of him whatever, for he was accidentally drowned while I was yet a baby. Mr. Foljambe, I should tell you, had consoled himself directly after my mother refused him, by marrying even before she did; and his wife died in a year or so, leaving him a son. That son is the Jasper Foljambe who now troubles me. Thus, you

see, Mr. Foljambe was left a widower about the same time my mother was left a widow; and as he had been very deeply attached to her, he in due time renewed his addresses to her. He was a very amiable, accomplished, high-principled man; and, as she had always esteemed him, though she had preferred my father, it is not surprising that he prevailed on her to accept him. I was so young at the time, that I really supposed him my father; and was only undeceived by a misjudging servant, who one day said something about 'your own papa.' I said, 'papa *is* my own papa!' to which she replied, 'no, miss, he's only your step-papa—your own papa is dead.' I ran crying to my step-father, and said, 'papa, Mary says you are not my own papa!' He took me on his knee, and gently said, 'your own papa, my dear, is dead; but I love you quite as much as if you were really my little daughter.' His kindness won me, but I had received a great blow. The shock,

however, soon subsided, and I may say we truly loved each other as father and daughter.

"In course of time, children were born to him and my mother, and they had a numerous family. I have survived them all. I was very fond of my little brothers and sisters; but Jasper Foljambe was never like one of the family, though he sometimes spent his holidays with us. He gave himself grandiose airs, as if he were sprung of a better stock, which he really was not. My stepfather had been called to the bar; but he was a man of studious, elegant tastes; and, as he had threatenings of a heart-complaint, and was in easy circumstances, he soon gave up practice, and resided entirely in the country. He farmed his own land, and helped to educate his children, which was quite occupation enough for him; and though our home was secluded, we were never in the least dull. Sometimes I visited friends and relations; but though I enjoyed the change of scene and so-

ciety, I was always glad to return home. These relations, all now dead, were related to my mother or my own father; I was never taken up by the Foljambes, who considered me a superfluous branch. When Jasper came to man's estate, he chose the law for his profession; but, instead of reading for the bar, he became a solicitor, which was a disappointment to my father. However, they continued on very good terms, and Jasper continued to visit us occasionally, till he married. It was a match for connection rather than affection or fortune, and his wife and we were what the Italians call antipathetic. They had no family, which we regretted for them more than they seemed to do for themselves.

"When I told you I was the only survivor of my mother's many children, that implied many deaths, many sorrows. Some were taken in infancy, others lived to be sweet little children; three reached the bloom and

promise of youth. I cannot tell you how these losses saddened our home—they hastened the death of my mother. This was a dreadful blow to my father and me. Jasper proposed our living in town; but neither of us were fond of London, nor did we think it agreed with us. We travelled from place to place, visiting most of our beautiful cathedrals, after which we settled in a secluded watering-place, familiar to my father in his boyhood. Here we lived very happily, till he died quite suddenly of spasms at the heart, leaving me alone as I am now.

"The watering-place ceased to please me when he was gone, so I came here, where my parents had spent their honeymoon. My own father had had no property to leave: my mother's was settled on her, and her children. My step-father was a very upright man, and, I am sure, made what he believed to be quite an equitable disposition of his fortune. He left the bulk of it,

certainly, to Jasper, who, meantime, had lost his wife, but he provided comfortably for me, as you may judge by the way in which I live. Unfortunately, though I have the independent use of what was my mother's money, which was not much, the rest comes to me through Mr. Foljambe, and depends on certain conditions, very unlikely to deprive me of it, but still which he might possibly make an unkind use of if he were so minded. I hope he never will be."

"Surely he never will," said Eleanor.

"He cannot in common reason or justice, for my step-father must have been under some misapprehension when he made such conditions; but reason and justice fail people sometimes when they think their own interests are concerned; and Mr. Foljambe and I have lately had a little controversy. It cannot, however, but end well."

CHAPTER IX.

There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,
And the glad parish pays the frugal fee.

CRABBE.

THE letter in the style of S. G. O. was written and sent, but not published, which Miss Clairvaux naturally attributed to a little hole-and-corner Buffery somewhere, though an easy solution of the mystery might have been found in the fact of her not having subjoined her own name and address, as specially exacted by the Editor of the Times. Long afterwards, when she happened to observe the important notice "To Corres-

pondents" prefixed to the leading article, she said, "ah, that explains," but did not re-write her letter—the impulse had gone off.

A block of new cottages was now springing up to replace the Dicks'; but, to Miss Clairvaux's chagrin, the space that should have been devoted to two was made to hold four, with windows too small and few to admit a free circulation of air, and no water supply. It was no use to tell her there had been none before, she said there ought to have been, and if a house burnt to the ground would not teach them common sense and humanity, nothing would. It did not signify that it was not her business; what was nobody's business was anybody's business, and she would make it hers. In fine, by strenuous exertions she succeeded in having the drainage and water-supply properly attended to.

"They may laugh at me," said she, "but those laugh best who laugh last. It would

have been no laughing matter to the poor tenants if I had not watched their interests."

And if giving a single cup of cold water to the poor creature who thirsts for it is promised its reward, surely securing to a whole family an ample supply for beverage and for cleanliness, will not be passed over.

The little sketch Miss Clairvaux had given Eleanor of her family history, wonderfully dispelled the silence she had hitherto maintained concerning her domestic relations. She now loved to allude to them, and it seemed to soften and freshen her character. It was now, "my father used to say."—"That was my dear mother's way of doing it," "my brother Arthur drew this map," "I keep this faded old sachet because my sister Agnes worked it."

And many anecdotes and traits of one and another escaped her, till Eleanor seemed able to individualize them all.

One day, she shewed Eleanor a water-

colour drawing of two young girls bending, like Helena and Hermia, over the same sampler; saying:

"It will give you some idea—not much, though—of my twin-sisters, Edith and Emily. They were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided."

"I wish the artist had shown their faces a little more," said Eleanor, "though the foreshortening is excellent."

"The artist was myself," said Miss Clairvaux.

"*You*, dear Miss Clairvaux?" said Eleanor in surprise.

"Well," said Miss Clairvaux, smiling, "your astonishment is not very complimentary. Do you think nobody can draw but yourself? I was never much of an artist, however, but I believe I have had as much pleasure in my pencil, as if I had drawn very well. According to my theory, it is not the amount of excellence one has attained, but the interest

one takes in the work, that is the source of pleasure in any art."

Claudia here came in, and said demurely, "Please, ma'am, here's Mr. Dick, will be glad to see you."

"Toby, do you mean?" cried Miss Clairvaux. "Dear me, is he out of the infirmary? I am very glad of it. How do you do, Toby? Come in! don't stand on ceremony."

"Is ceremony the oil-cloth?" says Toby. "Then, since you invite me, miss, I'll step on the carpet; only, you see, I'm not in my pumps."

"How are you, Toby? You look pale, my poor fellow."

"Ah," said Toby very sadly, "I've gone through a world of care. Only see this"—and he held up his hat, which was surrounded by a very handsome hat-band with long streamers. His clothes, too, though shabby, were black, and he had a new pair of black gloves.

"Your father?" said Miss Clairvaux quickly.

"That's just it," said Toby, "I'm an orphant, I am. Poor old father, he loved me, he did! Went off quite quiet, they say. Drooped from the time he went in. Fell off his grass; and when that's the case, you know —go we must."

"Did you see him in his last moments?"

"No, miss, I didn't; they never told me how he was declining till he was gone. That was their notion of kindness, you see. Very kind they were to me in the infirmary. I only wish they'd been equally so to poor old father. I 'tended his funeral, in course. A very poor affair they made of it—very poor, indeed. I never knew about it till too late, or I'd have taken that money out of your hands. There couldn't have been a better way of spending it. But, there—what must be, must."

After a deep sigh, Toby proceeded with:

"That wasn't the wust, though!" and a vengeful light kindled in his eye.

"You see, miss, they made an in-vallid of me till up to the decease; and then, when I said that follow his remains I would, the doctor said, if you will go, you may. It's my notion, he might have said it before. So, having sustained that la-*ment*able loss, and my own health seeming no longer in immediate je-oppardy, I felt no ways tied to the place, and made my bow. Werry sorry to part, and all that; and the authority (that's Mr. Butt) says, 'you're residuary legantee, I take it,' and hands me over a stocking. You might have knocked me down with a straw! 'What's that?' says I. 'That's your property,' says he, 'it *was* the late Mr. Dick's; but as you are his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, or, in one word, his representative, it now dewolves upon you. I've had the pleasure of taking care of it since he came into the house, and now I've the pleasure of handing it over to you. You may count it over, if you like. I dare say you know how much there

was in it.' 'Do you mean to say,' said I, 'that you had the heart to deprive the old man of his plaything?' 'Why, in course,' said he, 'folks that have money to spend don't need to come in here. That would be direct circumnavigation of the poor-rate.' 'Was he ready to part with it?' says I. 'Can't say he was,' says Mr. Butt. 'Anything but that.' I declare to you, madam, sir, or miss, whichever you be to be called, I was as nigh letting fly at his head with that stocking full of halfpence as I ever was to doing anything in my life. I could scarce keep my hands off him. 'You viper,' said I. It was the worst word, just then, I could think of; and my throat swelled, so as I couldn't get out another word—I just gave him a look, and walked out; leaving him looking as red as a turkey-cock. When I got out of sight, I sat down and cried. Oh, it was pitiful, wasn't it?"

Toby wiped away a genuine tear with a pictorial pocket-handkerchief.

"Talk of spoiling a ship for a penny'th of paint!" resumed he, "why, it's what officiality does! The laws are kind; the rates are kind; the public are kind; but the wheels are greased with unkindness and narrow-mindedness, and that's what makes 'em grate so!

"However," he resumed, "I was not a going to dewote that sacred inwestment to anything but father's memory; though Mr. Butt *did* say something in his feeling way 'bout its being a nice little nest-egg on which to start on a 'spectabler career. So I went straight to the undertaker's, and laid it out on the best of gloves and hatbands—at least, he said they were—d'ye think they're 'ansome?"

"Very handsome, Toby," said Miss Clairvaux.

"Shows my attachment, as much as a hatchment," said Toby.

"Equally so, Toby. Probably more so. And what are you going to do? Do you feel quite well?"

"I shall never be my own man again," said he gravely. "There's a pain in my back, comes on when I twist it ever so little, that tells me I shall never be a clown again; and that's a serious thing to a man whose living depends on his own excursions. But only think of Mr. Tribulini, (Trivet's his real name, for the matter of that), he has an 'art, that man has! I found a letter lying for me with a friend in the dress circles, saying that whenever I felt equal to join the troop, if unable to take my old role (not a penny roll, you understand,) I should take the checks at the doors, because he had a sincere regard for me. There's a thing, now, for a man to say! a man in a superior walk of the profession to one's own!"

"Very gratifying, no doubt," said Miss Clairvaux. "Still, I should have hoped that

after the painful realities you have experienced, your devotions to theatricals—"

"We're not theatricals, we're equestrians, we are," said Toby, with injured dignity. "All the difference in life."

"Still, Toby, equestrianism is not a vocation for a man who has a soul—"

"Much good a man without a soul would be at it!" said Toby. "Why, it requires all the wits a man has, and more besides! What is a vocation for a man with a soul? keeping a public? distilling gin? measuring tapes behind a counter? hanging behind another man's carriage?"

"In a general way, it may be said that trades which supply our needs are more respectable than those which only cater for our amusement."

"Ah well, you'll saw the plank away from under many a man's feet if you carry that out full length," said Toby. "However, that's neither here nor there; we must be

what we can. I'm not a butcher, nor baker, nor candlestick-maker, and, what's more, I'm no longer an able-bodied man; I must take what's given me, and I must say I can't find it in my heart not to be very much obliged to Mr. Tribulini."

"Certainly he means very kindly, and deserves your gratitude," said Miss Clairvaux. "I only thought that some little post or occupation of a quieter sort might have been found for you—"

"What sort of post?" interrupted Toby. "Mr. Butt said it wasn't every post that would be adaptuated to a man of my peculiar rabbits; not that I ever kept rabbits, though I don't deny carrier-pigeons."

"Well," said she considering, "I'm afraid a turnpike would hardly do."

"A clown at a turnpike? Oh law! Who'd go through?"

"That, I was going to say, would be difficult to obtain, though you have your friends

and well-wishers among us. But a nice little lodge, now, all over honey-suckle and sweet-briar, without anything to do but to open the gate!"

"Why, I should go melancholy mad in a week!" exclaimed Toby. "I couldn't bear it! all very well for them as has got a pretty voice, to sing 'In my cottage near a wood, Love and Rosa still combine (health and Laura, some copies have it) me to bless with every good that can render life divine,' but you see, that style of life wouldn't suit any of us, because we *must* have a little, more or less, of *excitement*."

"Ah, that's the very thing, I fear," said Miss Clairvaux, regretfully.

"Why should you fear it, miss?"

"Because it never comes to good, in high or low. When once the love, the need of excitement get hold of us, it makes the husband and father dissatisfied with his home, the wife, the mother, the daughter, the maid-

servant discontented with their respective duties, the young man idle and worthless, the child perverse and tiresome. It is the love of excitement, Toby, which ruins homes, and fills public-houses and theatres."

"That's putting it very strong," said Toby. "I never could see the good, myself, of being dull; and it was because my home was so mortial dull that I joined the circus."

"That is too often the case, I fear," said Miss Clairvaux. "Where homes are habitually dull, there must be something wrong somewhere, requiring a remedy."

"Just my notion," said Toby, "and now, look here, miss. As good a remedy as could be found would be a nice, respectable troop coming, say once a month or two months, through every town and village in the country. In the winter you might have jugglers or fantocini, innocent as lambs! at the Town Halls."

"Oh no, Toby! that would be no fitting remedy,."

"You're for the lecturing fellows, in white chokers, I dare say, miss, that tells about electrifying machines and all that—never could see the good of 'em myself! however, the world's running round, and I must keep moving."

"Here is the money, Toby, which I took care of for you."

"Thanke'e, miss; I asked you to do so, which made all the difference between me and father. He didn't ask Mr. Butt to take care of his!"

"Ah! well, that's past and gone now—we had better think no more about it. Would you like some refreshment before you go?"

"Thanke'e, miss. There was as pretty a little loin of pork as ever I set eyes on, at the kitchen fire as I came in."

"The loin of pork will not be ready for some time; but there is some cold beefsteak pie, which I think you would find very good."

"No objection, miss. Whatever comes first." And with an involuntary mixture of professional grimace and real gratitude, Toby retired to the kitchen; whence frequent peals of laughter were heard till he took his leave.

"Toby's spirits improved in the kitchen?" said Miss Clairvaux inquiringly to Claudia, as she turned from the window, where she had noted his departure.

"'Tis hard for such as he to keep dull long, I think, ma'am," said Claudia apologetically. "To think of a clown in a hat-band!" and, with a sob of suppressed laughter, she was hurrying away, when Miss Clairvaux arrested her with:

"Come, let me have the benefit of it. I want to know what he said."

"He said 'twas a very good pie, ma'am," said Claudia demurely; "better than they gave him on the stage; they used to give him sham ones at first, till one day, or night,

whichever it was, he said to all the people, 'this pie is only a make-believe,' so then the manager was ashamed, and gave him real ones afterwards."

"Oh! And was that all?"

"He said the beefsteak in them was only mutton."

"Ha! Anything more?"

"He said he didn't think his master would get another clown as good as hisself. 'Twasn't the words—any man might learn them—it was the expression."

"Humph! Well, I should think he was right." And when Claudia had retired, as grave as a judge, she added, "*Exempli gratia.* Claudia gave us the words, but left out the expression. I defy any one to have laughed at her!"

The next time Eleanor looked up from her drawing, she saw, to her surprise and pain, tears coursing down Miss Clairvaux's cheeks.

"Dear Miss Clairvaux!" exclaimed she anxiously, "is anything the matter?"

"Nothing, my dear," said Miss Clairvaux, looking ashamed; "I don't know what came over me...It was quite an unexpected weakness. I *am* a little low sometimes."

And, for a minute or two, she cried quietly, but bitterly.

"There, it's over now," said she, drying her eyes. "I suppose we are all liable, at times, to feel depressed, we don't know why. I have not had one of these little gushes, though, a long time, and am not likely to have one soon again. Oh! *this*, I dare say, upset me, though I could not trace the chain —"

And, taking up her drawing-book, she looked at it thoughtfully, and then replaced it on the shelf. It did not seem quite clear to Eleanor, however, that the drawing-book had caused her tears.

"Eleanor!" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux sud-

denly, in the evening, as they were quietly working, "would you not very much like to see your mother down here?"

"To be sure I should!" said Eleanor quickly, with a bright flush of colour.

"Then, why should not she come?"

"Ah, you are very good, but I fear she could not leave George —"

"What, not for a few days?"

"No, I do not think she would—but she might for a few hours —"

"It would hardly be worth her while to come for only a few hours —"

"Dear Miss Clairvaux!—it would be so delightful!—"

"Well, certainly it would be so to me, in your place—or in your mother's. But, Eleanor, might not George get a few days' holiday and come down too?—say at Easter."

"That would be doubly delightful," said Eleanor with sparkling eyes. "Almost too charming to think of."

"Not at all. It is quite feasible; and I shall be very glad to see them. So make haste, and save this evening's post—never put a thing off till to-morrow that can be done to-day —"

"How you love, Miss Clairvaux, to make people happy!"

"Well, I hope that is nothing very uncommon—certainly it is nothing very meritorious; for I find it the shortest road to my own happiness. Whenever I feel a little down, I always take it for a very good hint to cheer up somebody else. I will write a little scrap to your mother which you can inclose in your note."

The scrap was a cordial invitation, and their pens were soon speeding over the paper. A little hurry was necessary, just enough to be exciting, to get the envelope closed and directed before Trim came for the letters. Afterwards they amused themselves with

picturing the surprise, pleasure, and bustle the invitation would occasion.

"Mamma is so passionately fond of the country," said Eleanor, "and yet for years has scarcely been out of London. She was brought up in a country vicarage, and, in early days, used to accompany my father on his summer progresses, but latterly she could not well manage it, and so I was his companion instead. Delightful times we used to have! staying in country inns or farm-houses, and camping out all day, I working while he sketched."

"Why did not you sketch too?"

"I did sometimes. The children of artists, even without inheriting their father's talent, learn to draw, almost without being taught; and pick up principles of art by hearing them continually talked of. But my father had a very mean opinion of ladies' performances in general, so that I was a little afraid of him. He used to say that if we would excel in

painting we must serve an apprenticeship to it, like any handicraft art, and that though there was no reason why women should not do this, the will was too often wanting."

"There has been an immense amount of nonsense talked and written of late," said Miss Clairvaux, "about woman's mission and rights, and so forth. Women are thrusting their noses in, where in many cases they are very little wanted. They get no thanks for their pains; and there is plenty for them to do, if they will but look about for it, without occasioning any animadversion. To apply principle to practice—if the invitation is accepted, Eleanor, which I am certain it will be, I shall have 'the mother of fragments' transferred to the loft, and the room on the stairs fitted up for your brother."

"Oh, why take so much trouble for him? He could sleep so nicely in the little room above."

"No, it would not do for him, and I have

long been intending to have an Arabian bedstead put up in 'the blue chamber.' Everything the room wants is in the house—it will put me to no expense."

In twenty-four hours, Mrs. Graydon's joyful acceptance was received. George thought he could rely on a three days' holiday, "if a patient, whose case he was watching, would oblige him by getting well." From this moment, it was wonderful how much work Miss Clairvaux and Eleanor made for themselves. Mr. Debenham, happening to call for some local subscription, was mystified by the unusual commotion.

"I could not make out," said he afterwards to his mother, what was going on at the Peaked House to-day—everything turned topsy-turvy, as when people are moving—clean curtains putting up, and I know not what all."

"Rather early for a spring rout," observed

Mrs. Debenham. "Perhaps the chimnies had been swept."

"That Miss Graydon," he presently added, "is a nice, pretty girl. I wonder who she is—a poor relation most likely. I wonder how she likes vegetating among us. She's hardly likely to find a husband, where she is."

It was just after Mr. Debenham's hasty visit, that Miss Jones looked in.

"I just came to say—" she began; "but, dear me, I fear I intrude—you are preparing for company."

"Preparing for Easter visitors," said Miss Clairvaux, cheerfully; "but you do not intrude by any means. I am glad to see you."

"Oh, well then, in that case—" and she sat down and looked about her with complacency. "Ah," said she, "I recollect when *we* used to have these bustles at Easter and Christmas, and other holiday times. I was one of a large family once, Miss Clairvaux.

It makes me smile, and sigh too, to look over our old receipt book, and see the different proportions of what we used!—'Take six eggs'—and now one will do! A large family of girls; not one brother among us."

"So I have heard," said Miss Clairvaux. "You know, it is the inevitable law of nature that families should disperse; but survivors cannot help feeling it sometimes. *I* feel it."

"Ah," said Miss Jones, "but it is not the inevitable law of nature, I suppose, that young ladies should not marry, unless upon a certain number of hundreds a year. My father was very crotchetty about that. 'No one shall marry any one of my girls,' he used to say, 'unless he can support a wife.' Support, of course! But how support? You know, Miss Clairvaux, we may support ourselves on bread-and-butter, or even without the butter, but we must have the bread.

Everybody admits that; but one needn't have puddings and pies, for instance, nor wine put on every day, nor hot things for breakfast. And if young people are ready to do without them, are old people justified in saying 'you shan't?'"

"That is a vexed question," said Miss Clairvaux, "which has lately been very much canvassed, and which you and I, probably, are very much of the same mind about."

"It will give me great pleasure to find it is so," said Miss Jones simply, "for there is nothing more agreeable than the interchange of ideas between people who think pretty much alike. Well, my father. . . . Do I bore you? or hinder you? Do let me run in that string for you. It will be such a pleasure to feel myself of a little use. You know, there are fathers who will say of a lieutenant, 'had he been a captain,' or of a curate, 'had he been a vicar.' At least, so it was said in our family. And now,—

shall you be surprised, when I say that the lieutenant *is* a captain, and the curate a rector with eight hundred a year! But my father wanted faith; and so neither of them married a Miss Jones."

She smiled a little sadly; and looking at Eleanor, said,

"Be advised by me, my dear, and don't always take papa's view of things."

Eleanor started; and replied gravely:

"I have no father. And he was very kind, and wise, and good."

"Oh! dear, I have trenched on forbidden ground," cried Miss Jones penitently. "How could I be so foolish? I wish I had bitten my tongue first. Your mourning garb and all! My dear, pray forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, I assure you," said Eleanor.

Miss Jones seemed collecting her thoughts, and then she said:

"Oh! but what I came here to say was

about Mrs. Gwyther. She has come into the bow-windowed house; and we were quite on the wrong scent. She is neither a Plymouth brother, nor anything else; that she ought not to be, I mean. But the reason Mrs. Swain thought we should not care to visit her, is, that she is the widow of a rag-merchant!"

"Well, I am glad you have satisfied yourselves," said Miss Clairvaux, rather contemptuously. "Surely I have heard that Mrs. Plover's father made his fortune by importing wax dolls' glass eyes?"

"Oh! that's a clean trade," said Miss Jones.

"Clean? yes; but it *is* a trade, nevertheless; and I don't suppose Mr. or Mrs. Gwyther sorted the rags themselves. Let us 'live and let live.' There is no need for our calling on persons that we do not expect to like; indeed it seems to me a very stupid and tiresome plan for everybody to call on every-

body, consuming a great deal of time that might be better employed; but we need not, therefore, pick holes in our neighbours' coats."

"No, certainly not. Then, do you think you shall call on Mrs Gwyther?"

"No, I sacrifice more time than I can well spare to morning-visiting already, and we are so far apart that there is no occasion for it."

"Do you see any objection to other people calling on her?"

"None whatever! if they like to do so."

"I think I shall, then," said Miss Jones after a pause, "because, you see, the distance is not so great between us as between her and you; nor is my time so fully employed as yours, nor are my friends so numerous. So that it may be a gain, and it can't be a loss."

"A mutual gain. I hope it may prove so."

"I suppose," said Miss Jones, as she

rose to take leave, "you have not seen the clown again?"

"Toby Dick? O, yes!"

"Then, *did* you ask him about the leopards?"

"Oh dear, I quite forgot it," said Miss Clairvaux. "You see, the poor fellow was in distress, and had just lost his father, so that our conversation was chiefly on his personal concerns. He showed very good feeling, though he is such an oddity —"

"He had just left the infirmary, I suppose?"

"Yes; he had just left the infirmary. He got his dinner here, and then went on to join the troop."

"Very kind of you to give him his dinner, I'm sure," said Miss Jones.

"Oh, no. A poor man's bite and sup need never be missed."

It was somewhere about this time, that Mrs. Burrowes observed to her husband —

"Whoever that pretty girl in black may be, it is plain she is doing Miss Clairvaux much good, and making her more like other people."

"Other people are, in a general way, so common-place," returned he, "that I rather esteemed the variety."

"As a matter of amusement, you might," said Mrs. Burrowes, "but it is never well for a woman to be peculiar, and, therefore, I am glad that her young friend is influencing her, even in her dress."

"Miss Graydon seems a nice girl," rejoined he. "Not one of those young ladies who sit on the carpet when there are plenty of chairs; which I always consider the height of namby-pamby."

Eleanor would never have dreamed of proposing any modification of Miss Clairvaux's dress; but certain it is that Miss Clairvaux's own sense and taste had suggested some such reflections as these:—

"Eleanor looks a hundred times better than I do, and why? Chiefly on account of her youth and prettiness, of course; but likewise because she adapts herself, in moderation, to the fashions of the day, which I, perhaps, too habitually despise. To be sure, Antigone or Andromache would look ridiculous enough in a hoop; but, as I am neither Andromache nor Antigone, it may be as well to follow the customs of the time;—which *they* did."

And so Miss Clairvaux conformed.

CHAPTER X.

This only grant me, that my means may lie
Too low for envy, for contempt too high;
  Some honour I would have
Not for great deeds, but good alone;
Th' unknown are better than ill-known,
  Rumour can ope the grave;
Acquaintance I would have, but *when* depends
Not on the number, but the choice of friends.

Books should, not business, entertain the light,
And sleep, as undisturbed as death, the night.
  My house, a cottage more
Than palace, and should fitting be
For all my use, no luxury.
Thus would I double my life's fading space,
For he that runs it well, runs twice his race.

COWLEY.

THE happy time arrived when Eleanor

might start for the railway station without being much too soon for the train that was to bring the looked-for travellers; and Miss Clairvaux watched her departure from the window, and remembered her own young heart.

In about three quarters of an hour, the sound of cheerful, intermingled voices drew her to the window again, and she saw some one almost as light and as active as Eleanor herself, and in widow's mourning, walking with Eleanor, accompanied by a well-grown, good-looking young man. Mrs. Graydon had an intelligent, pleasant countenance, and in manner was self-possessed. Whether she had, or had not lived much in society, she betrayed no ignorance of its rules. Of George, there was by no means the same well-grounded security of his never doing or saying anything but just the thing he ought; in a word, he was a young medical student, who, in his own phrase would have told you, that he had very

little tin, but lots of brass. His manners hardly did him justice, but they covered an excellent disposition and good abilities; and Miss Clairvaux felt she could like him. He was in very lively spirits, but became surprisingly sedate when Eleanor took her mother to her room, and he found himself left with Miss Clairvaux. As she took real interest in his prospects, she spoke to him on things about which he could talk readily enough; and began by saying she supposed his patient had obliged him by getting well.

"Oh yes, ma'am, I was obliged to show him he had better do so."

"How did you manage that?"

"Well, you see he was an author; and authors are such ticklish customers. He said he felt as if some one was at work with a gimlet at the back of his head, a little above the nape of his neck; but I made him admit nobody in the body was doing it, and put it to him whether any one out of the body

would think it worth his while. This he was disinclined to answer. I then assured him, that there was nothing evil spirits objected to so much as clean water, and got him to hold his head under a tap while I let the water run upon it. This quite exorcised the gimlet, but he was afraid it would come back again. I said he had only to apply the same remedy. He said he would, but then with a deep sigh, said he was afraid it was on his mind. I said, 'have a mind, then, to throw it off. If you can't, why, never mind it.' But no, he couldn't be trifled with. I said, 'I suppose you're like the American gentleman—a pyramid of mind on a dark desert of despair.' He laughed a little, and said, 'after all, it's no use fretting, only it *does* rile a fellow a little to have the fruits of his labour and genius set at nought by all the world through the critique of a carping caviller!' 'Ah, my dear fellow,' said I, 'if that's where the shoe pinches, cheer up. Half the world

won't read the critique, depend upon it, and the other half will never so much as hear of your book!' He abused me, called me all manner of names, but I got him to laugh, and—'pon my honour, ma'am, it cured him!"

"No doubt," said Miss Clairvaux, laughing. "Your prescription of clean water was excellent."

"Holy water, ma'am, it might well be called."

It was a pleasant evening to them all, rendered genial by family happiness.

Next morning, which was Good Friday, George joined the breakfast-party, fresh from a walk. He had been some miles over the country, with Fly for his companion, and thought the neighbourhood charming.

It was a cheerful walk to church, for many had gathered their families and friends about them for Easter, and rosy school-boys and blooming girls were clustering about their parents. Mrs. Rowe was almost electrified

when she saw Miss Clairvaux walk up the aisle with three companions, and Mr. Debenham, who noticed the little procession and had plenty of room in his square pew, opened the door a little, and quietly signed to Eleanor and George to enter, which they did. As for Mrs. Plover, her resolute eyes took a minute inventory of Mrs. Graydon's dress during the course of the lessons. Unfortunately, her estimate of it was unsatisfactory.

"Who would have thought of your mustering in such strong force?" said Mrs. Debenham to Miss Clairvaux as they took the same church path together, going home.

"Ah, people surprise their neighbours sometimes," said Miss Clairvaux. "I was surprised to see your Easter party so small."

"Oh, Harry and Jack are spending their holidays with their cousins at Eastbourne, so we have quite a quiet house. What an excellent sermon Doctor Hurst gave us this morning!"

"I know he is a great favourite of yours.—

Mr. Debenham," said Miss Clairvaux quickly, as she heard George tell him how fond he was of riding, and Mr. Debenham offer him a horse, "mind what you are about! young surgeons are not remarkably careful riders; I would not insure Polly's knees."

"Oh, I'm not going to lend Polly," said Mr. Debenham, laughing, "only the boys' poney, Gimcrack. I thank you all the same."

"I wouldn't have broken Polly's knees, though," said George.

"Ah, but I am much better satisfied you should have Gimcrack," said Miss Clairvaux, "and you may consider yourself well off, I think, to have *him*."

"Oh yes, I do," said George, exchanging most friendly adieux with Mr. Debenham at parting, rather to Eleanor's scandal.

"George!" said she, aside, to him, "how familiar you were with a man you never saw before."

"How familiar *he* was with a man he

never saw before!" retorted George. "I like him; he's a good fellow."

"I don't think you ought to have accepted his horse."

"His poney, you mean. Why not?"

"He does not know who we are."

"I don't know who *he* is."

"No, and therefore—"

"Pooh, pooh! it's all stuff. *We* understand one another well enough. I didn't ask him."

"No, but you said very expressively, how much you should like a ride."

"Why, you wouldn't have had me say I shouldn't like it? Fiddlesticks! I didn't know the man had a horse."

"I think you guessed it, though. Now, didn't you!"

George burst out laughing, and said, "I thought he might have. Of course, as I walk about and meet people, I continually have such thoughts as: 'That man may have a

horse. That woman may have a cow. That boy may have a poney.'"

"Well, all I hope is, that you will be careful and not break his knees."

"Then, considering your apprehensive nature, Miss Nelly, I don't think you hope enough. Might not you have added—nor your own neck?"

"I might; and do."

"No danger. I don't expect Gimcrack to have much go in him. D'ye know him?"

"O, no."

"Never mind. Anything with four legs will do."

Eleanor's fears, however, that George was taking too great a liberty, could not be appeased till Miss Clairvaux reassured her.

"I know Gimcrack very well," said she. "I do not think your brother will hurt him. Mr. Debenham would not have lent him a really valuable horse."

"He might, though," muttered George.

Falling a little behind with his sister, he presently observed—

"That Mr. Debenham is a gentleman; and yet one may always see whether a man is town or country-bred."

"The difference partly exists, perhaps, in your own imagination," said Eleanor. "Many of the Meadowleigh gentlemen go to London every day."

"Does Mr. Debenham?"

"No."

"Or every week?"

"No."

"I could have told it! I knew it."

"You need not disparage country gentlemen: they are the pride of England."

"All of them?"

"Many of them."

"Yes, I know that very well, only those who don't go to town often, want a certain *je ne sais quoi* which —"

"The students of Guy's Hospital possess."

"Ah, well, you may laugh, but I know what I mean. If a country gentleman got among us at Guy's, he'd be smoked."

"More shame for Guy's then. However, I don't mean to say that town and country are alike. Here, you know, a cockney would soon betray his ignorance about pheasant-shooting, and fox-hunting, and fishing, and farming, and planting —"

"A 'cockney'—what a horrid word—quite exploded now."

"Except in Punch?"

"Well, yes, there are cocknies in Punch. Famous capital he makes of them."

"What a treat it was to me," Mrs. Graydon was saying, "to find myself once more in a regular old country church!"

"The rose-window and open-recessed porch are good," said Miss Clairvaux, "but the gallery is an eye-sore; and you might surely hear better preaching in London."

"Certainly, any one may hear a good

sermon in London," said Mrs. Graydon, "who chooses to go far enough for it."

"And those are very foolish, or very slothful who do not. We would not buy bad bread of a baker, merely because he lived next door; and does not the same hold good with the bread of life?"

"There are substantial family reasons, though, for not straggling from the parish church."

"I admit that there may be," said Miss Clairvaux rather reluctantly. "Only, the whole family might sometimes do better for themselves than they do."

"*My* family is now such a nominal one," said Mrs. Graydon, "that I go where George likes to go. It is a great thing for a young man to take real interest in regularly attending *any* ministry. So we go in the morning to the Temple, and in the evening to our district church."

"Where you doubtless hear something

less jejune than Dr. Hurst gave us this morning," said Miss Clairvaux.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Graydon, "he did not seem to me quite as common-place as you appear to think him. I liked his saying that however we may be in the dark as to the predestination of mankind, we may be sensible, within ourselves, of having benefited by something *not* the result of our own free-will; of having been destined for something of which we had no pre-conception."

"*Did* he say that?" rejoined Miss Clairvaux with quickness. "Then I never heard him!—yes," said she, after a short pause, "that was good, very good; worth remembering and dwelling upon. I must have been strangely absent, shamefully inattentive, not to notice it."

She dwelt upon it afterwards with a self-reproach akin to remorse.

"That good little woman," thought she, "is far better than I am. Quiet and unobtrusive, with 'a mind at leisure from itself,'

she does not let a good thing escape her, through thinking herself wiser than her teachers. I may have done a worthy man injustice before to-day."

Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man tells us that "a fault which humbles a man, sometimes is of more use to him than a good action which puffs him up with pride." May it not have been so with Miss Clairvaux?

"Certainly," thought she, afterwards, as her mind reverted to lighter things, "it *was* curious that Mr. Debenham should be so ready to offer the poney. I suppose he likes George. Or what if he likes Eleanor? That may be; and really it might not be a bad thing. Here am I castle-building once more! Who would have thought it?

'Who would have thought my shrivelled heart
Would have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground, as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown,
Where they together, all the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house alone.'

"That is what I have done so long!—'dead to the world, kept house alone;' and it has been good for me, too; but too much of it is not good. Good or not good, it has been perforce. All my natural ties having dropped off, it never occurred to me to form new ones. I did not send for this young girl on my own account; I only thought of doing a kindness; and it has been its own reward. The young thing has found herself a warm place in my heart, and given me her own; without loving her mother any the less, but, indeed, all the more, for absence has strengthened her affection. Very touching and pretty it is to see the little hugs and caresses they give one another, when they think no one sees. Eleanor will take George's great, muscular hand, too, and stroke it. I saw her do so yesterday evening—as Frank used to stroke mine. I, too, had a mother, once, to kiss. Yes, but that is all dead and gone now. I need not be sad, however. Hope remains; and the

power of being useful. While that is the case, we are not cast on regrets."

While Miss Clairvaux was in this expansive mood, it occurred to her that it might not be amiss to invite Mr. and Mrs. Debenham to tea. A friendly, chatty evening might not be despised by them; at any rate, they should have the option. So she wrote a cordial note, and the invitation for the following evening was accepted with readiness. No one expected gaiety in Passion-week, but there was always an inclination to see more of the inside of the Peaked House; and the Debenhams had really been always disposed to meet Miss Clairvaux more than half way.

Eleanor, passing the open door of Miss Clairvaux's dressing-room, the next morning, saw her on her knees before an old oaken plate-chest, from which she was disintering sundry obsolete pieces of plate, yellow for want of cleaning; and enveloped

in shrouds of silver paper to prevent their rubbing.

"Dear Miss Clairvaux!" said she, laughing, "who would have thought you such a worshipper of mammon?"

"Well, my dear, I hope I don't make idols of these things, though I'm down on my knees before them. But what is the good of having them if they are never used? and they will be all the better for cleaning."

"What a beautiful cream-ewer! I never saw one, the shape of which pleased me so much."

"Indeed?" said Miss Clairvaux, with sudden liveliness. "Then I'll give it to you, Eleanor, when you marry! That is," added she, with a bright smile, "if you marry to please me!"

"Oh! thank you, Miss Clairvaux!" cried Eleanor, kissing her. And she stood for a few seconds with the delicate little jug poised between her thumb and fore-finger, as one

may have seen the statuette of a Grecian nymph; lost in dreams, that were evidently in harmony with Miss Clairvaux's conditions. Of what was the young girl thinking?

CHAPTER XI.

With the young or the old, with the maid or the wife,
O may I enliven the evening of life,
Still gay without pride and jocose without art,
With some sense in my tongue and much truth in my heart.

A TEA-PARTY given by Miss Clairvaux was a novelty; and as such, was duly reported by Mrs. Debenham to Mrs. Rowe and Mrs. Plover. "Quite a quiet affair, of course. Miss Clairvaux does not go out, you know, or receive company generally. Only Sam and me, in fact, and some friends from London."

Mrs. Plover and Mrs. Rowe bridled, and thought they might as well have been asked too. People should not do things by halves.

Mrs. Rowe was an inoffensive little woman enough, whose amusement was chiefly derived from the small affairs of the neighbourhood, and whose disappointment at finding herself passed over when she might as well have been included, was unaccompanied by any bitterness. This was not exactly the case with Mrs. Plover, who was indeed a widow, but not a widow indeed, according to the definition of St. Paul. She rather ranked with those busy bodies, existing in his time and at all times, who, more the pity, wander from house to house, not only idle, but tatlers, speaking things which they ought not; and when she heard of Miss Clairvaux's giving a tea-party to which she was not invited, she felt herself an injured woman, and decided that it must be inquired into.

Of course it would have been neglecting

an opportunity had Mr. Debenham and Miss Clairvaux met without finding anything to argue about. They began about the gas.

"I hope, Miss Clairvaux, if you meditate a series of 'at homes' next winter, you will have a gas-lamp at your gate. My mother and I were very nearly decanted into your garden."

"Oh no, I meditate nothing of the kind. A gas-lamp would completely de-ruralize my cottage. Nobody comes here after dark; and why should I drag people from their fire-sides, without offering even the temptation of a rubber?"

"That's a temptation you might easily afford them."

"Quite out of my line, as you know."

"Against your principles, I suppose. Why, now, what can people do better? I don't mean *better*, you know, but how can they get through an evening? when you've a lot of people, you know, and so forth."

"Oh, there are many ways."

"Many good society-games, too," put in Mrs. Graydon. "You know, Eleanor, we used to have several in Newman Street."

"Oh, those things are mostly very stupid unless you happen to be very clever," said Mr. Debenham. "I enjoy a game of romps with my children, of all things, but as for proverbs and so on, I'd as soon see Punch and Judy. I wonder how young ladies can have the face to perform in tableaux—Juliet in the balcony and so forth."

"Charades, though, are famous," said George. "What good ones we used to get up with Maurice Day, Eleanor!"

"What words, for instance?" said Mr. Debenham.

"Hamlet— Falstaff— Banditti— Knighthood (Robin Hood, you know, or Red Ridinghood if you liked it better). And Queen Elizabeth knighting Sir Walter Raleigh."

"I see. Yes, those would be capital, only they would want so much getting up."

"Oh no, anything that came to hand. My mother's saucepan lids and spits used to furnish a sufficient armoury. Charades are worth little that require much preparation. They ought to be impromptu."

"Great talent required, though!"

"O no."

"O yes: I'm sure of it. You could not get up anything of the sort in Meadowleigh."

"What, not at Christmas?" said George incredulously.

"Oh! no. We're an awfully slow set."

"An average set of young people —"

"But we *have* no young people! that's the singularity of it!"

"No, we really have no young people," said Mrs. Debenham.

"Well, that's the oddest thing I ever heard," said George.

"I thought I saw a good many pretty

young faces in smart bonnets, coming out of church yesterday," said Mrs. Graydon.

"Oh, those were shop-girls and tradesmen's daughters," said Mrs. Debenham. "None of them ladies. You know, Miss Clairvaux, there really *are* no young people here."

"No, it is a curious fact," said Miss Clairvaux, "but there are none. Only an unfledged girl here and there, not old enough to go into society, and a good many old, elderly, and middle-aged spinsters."

George looked astounded. "What have you done, then," said he, "with all your rising generation?"

"The rising generation, strictly speaking, go to school. Those who have left school, have married and dispersed."

"Dear me, it must be a very stupid place to live in!"

"Well, it *is* rather stupid," said Mr. Debenham with magnanimous concession.

"Oh! no, Sam," said Mrs. Debenham, "it's a very nice place. I won't hear anything said against it."

"Nice, in your point of view, mamma. You have your little coterie, your church-going on week-days, and all that; but it *is* a stagnant place, except for a man with a profession, and who belongs to the Union Hunt, and all that —"

"Good hunting here?" said George.

"Pretty good."

"Do you belong to the hunt?"

"Yes. Very pleasant. Gentlemanlike set of men."

"It *must* be very pleasant."

"Why, yes. Most things in life one gets tired of. Everything, in fact. But hunting is a thing one *never* gets tired of."

George looked as if he could well believe it.

"Book-clubs are nice things," suggested Mrs. Graydon. "You know, Eleanor, we

used to belong to a very pleasant one. We drank tea with one another once a month."

"Ah, you couldn't get up one here," said Mr. Debenham. "Nobody reads."

"Oh dear!—"

"Why, how should they? They've no time. And they've no books."

"Well, I would as soon do without my dinner as without my book," said Mrs. Graydon. "One grows so rusty!"

"Oh yes, we *do*."

"You are making yourself out a great reader, mamma," said George.

"No, I know I'm not that; but I always have something in hand. I like to have my mark moving regularly forward in a book, if it be but a page a day."

"A plan too little followed, ma'am," said Mr. Debenham. "People race through everything now, and forget directly what they have read. As for reading a book a second time! or making extracts!—"

"Ah, that's the way to get the heart out of a book," said Mrs. Graydon. "You know, Eleanor, your papa used to say so."

"So did *my* papa," said Miss Clairvaux. "I used to fill volumes with extracts."

"The worst of it, though," said Mr. Debenham, "is, that one never reads the extracts afterwards."

"I don't admit that. Sometimes they bring to mind things you have forgotten for years, in books you have lost sight of, and can no longer reach. Besides, the mere act of copying the extracts, fixes them in your mind."

"Yes, that is very true," said George. "I know that taking notes of lectures fixes things in my mind, even before I write them out."

Mr. Debenham here began to question George about the lectures he attended, and the conversation became rather professional; but not too much so for the ladies to follow,

though they were quite quiet. George told a good many things that were both interesting and amusing. After this, Mr. Debenham turned over a portfolio of caricatures of old Mr. Foljambe's collecting, which proved highly diverting, and led back to public characters of a past generation.

"Ah, here are Pitt, and Fox, and Bute, and all the rest of them!" said Mr. Debenham, with interest. "I used to hear my father talk of them; but how completely they're gone by, now! Our young people know little of them except by name. Edmund Burke! surprising genius; but what an ugly fellow! Wilkes, with his squint; which he got by mimicking a school-fellow. What a grin he has! The events are gone by; but the humour won't die."

"Not as good as Punch, though," said George. "The drawing isn't as good, and the fun is more ill-natured. And there's no fun, nor any drawing, equal to Cruikshank's."

Bad drawing, however, did not spoil Mr. Debenham's enjoyment of racy humour; and one thing led them on to another, till they began to contrast the state of society in the last age with the present, and to quote family anecdotes, and to talk of the Gordon riots, and the court of Queen Charlotte, and the French revolution of '92, and the war in La Vendée, and the English prisoners in France, and many a thing besides, on which it was surprising how much the elder ladies had to say. At length, Mrs. Debenham remarked,

"We were complaining how few ways there were of spending an evening pleasantly, and I think we have found one without any difficulty."

"By talking, you mean? Oh yes, of course. You ladies bring out your old stories sometimes in a wonderful way, like your old plate and diamonds. I'm sure I never heard before half the stories my mother has been

telling. I hope she has not been inventing them."

"Sam! I could not if I would."

"Well, perhaps not," said he laughing. "And there is another amusement nobody has yet mentioned. Miss Clairvaux has a piano."

"Come, Eleanor, persuade your brother to sing something with you," said Miss Clairvaux. And song and duet followed one another till Mrs. Debenham after sundry vain attempts to catch her son's eye, said:

"Sam, my dear, I'm sure our fly must be here."

Mr. Debenham, however, who was very fond of music, was deaf as well as blind to his mother's appeals, or perhaps he heard the jingle of glasses, which preceded the entrance of Claudia, looking very self-important with cake and wine.

During Eleanor's last song, there had been a colloquy in under-tones, between Miss

Clairvaux and Mrs. Debenham, as they sat beside one another on the sofa. Mrs. Debenham was desirous of persuading Miss Clairvaux to return the visit before her friends left her, quite in an unceremonious way; and Miss Clairvaux was saying that they would only be with her till Tuesday, and she never accepted evening engagements, she had many reasons for finding it best, as a rule, to decline them; and Mrs. Debenham said, oh, but this was no engagement worth speaking of, merely a verbal invitation, only to a little friendly meeting, and Monday would suit her as well as any other time; there should be no fuss, no ceremony, she would take it as a personal proof of regard. So, in short, the gentle-spoken, smiling old lady carried her point with the person who was considered to have the strongest will, and the least value for forms in Meadowleigh; but it must not be supposed that Miss Clairvaux would have let herself be talked over by a dozen bland old

ladies, had not the genial influences of the evening—the music, the mirth, the lights, the warmth, the pleasant feeling of hospitality, and of making others happy, blended and united together in producing a pliable state of mind and philanthropic abnegation of her own private tastes, which led to this remarkable result. With many kind and cheerful greetings, then, this little group of persons separated, soon to meet again.

CHAPTER XII.

Laer.—For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion.

Of Easter Sunday, it needs only to be recorded that it was as happy a day to them all as it could possibly be. Bright Easter morning! less triumphantly hailed, it may be, among our undemonstrative selves than in countries where, after their long, rigorous fast and solemn night-service, the people run about, kissing and embracing, exchanging forgiveness, loading one another with gifts, and

crying, "Christ is risen!" yet by none more reverently and fittingly valued for its own peculiar remembrances; among those of us, at least, who are loving and thoughtful.

On Easter Monday, that holiday of thousands, Eleanor persuaded George to forego his ride till the afternoon, and ramble with her in the morning, over hill and down dale. It was quite early in April, and the trees were yet leafless, but when is the country not beautiful? The nightingale and thrush were already to be heard, the hedges were beginning to shew a curious undergrowth of pale green beneath the protecting network of the outer branches, and primroses and celandine were blossoming on warm banks.

George, like most young surgeons, was well up in botany, and as they went on their way, he darted on every new specimen he could find.

"That Miss Clairvaux," said he presently, "is a capital old girl."

"Don't call her that, George; it is so disrespectful."

"Well, I won't call her anything, then; but she is a brick."

"She is everything that is good and kind. I cannot tell you how I love her."

"Lucky for you that she wanted a companion!"

"She did not want one—she took me out of pure kindness."

"Whew!—then she may part with you any day."

"O no! that would not be like her."

"My mother and she seem to get on famously."

"Yes; I am so glad of it!—I could not tell, beforehand, how they would accord."

"That Mr. Debenham, too, is a capital fellow; and I think, Eleanor, he looks a little sweet upon you."

"Nonsense!" said Eleanor indignantly.

"I do think it though, seriously."

"Then you think quite wrong; and I hope you won't say anything of the sort again, or you will make me quite dislike him. Come, let us run down the hill." And away she darted. Just as they reached the road, Mr. Burrowes trotted briskly past them, and smilingly bowed to Eleanor.

"Who's that?" said George quickly.

"Mr. Burrowes, the doctor."

"*The* doctor?" have you only one?"

"Oh yes, there are others, only he has the best practice."

"What a jolly-looking fellow! *He* don't let care feed on his damask cheek! What should you say his practice was worth?"

"Oh, I have not the smallest idea!"

"A thousand a year, perhaps—fifteen hundred —"

"I have no notion at all."

"But you can guess!"

"No, I have really nothing to go upon."

"I should think that horse was very likely worth a hundred guineas—capital action!"

"He goes such distances that he must have a good horse."

"Very likely another horse in his stable."

"Oh yes, more than one."

"Shouldn't I like to be that man? Has he a partner?"

"No."

"Shouldn't I like to be his partner!"

"Should not we all like to be a little better off than we are," said Eleanor smiling. "You must get on by degrees. Very likely Mr. Burrowes was at one time no better off than you are."

"Not at all likely. Rely on it, that man began the world with money."

"But I cannot rely on what I know nothing about. Many of our most eminent men have begun the world with nothing. If you try, perhaps you may be eminent, too."

"Oh no, I know I shan't get along without money."

"Well, you must try. You did not speak in that desponding way, when you persuaded papa and mamma to let you study medicine. Now, did you?"

"Well—no, I did not," said George, smiling a little. "But, come, tell me some more about this Mr. Burrowes. He has all the best country practice, you say?"

"Town and country. Everybody has him who can get him. And, George, I think it is not only owing to his known skill, but to his manners—"

"One of your spoony fellows, I suppose."

"No, not spoony at all. But courteous and kindly; a thorough gentleman. That always *tells* in a sick room."

"Oh, in a sick room, people only care for what you know and can do."

"Those are the main points, but they also care for being spoken kindly and gently to;

and then, when they begin to get better, they like a little chat."

"Blarney. 'Soft finish for family use.'"

"No, no."

"Scandal. Absent friends sliced up with pepper and vinegar."

"No—the news of the day, and, if you will, the news of the neighbourhood, only it need not be scandalous—should not, must not be:—public affairs—new books, new discoveries, and so forth."

"Is that man married?"

"Mr. Burrowes? Oh yes, he has a pretty wife."

"Children?"

"Half-a-dozen, at least."

"Ah!" said George, drawing in his breath with a hissing sound, and looking very solemn, "those are the things that weigh a man down."

"But I thought you said how merry he looked!"

"Well, so I did. Jolly!" said George, laughing heartily at the recollection.

Afterwards, he said he did not know but what, as he had no prospect at home, it might be a good thing to go abroad—to Africa, for instance. There were always openings on the gold-coast; fellows died off so; then they made room for others. And up the country, at Dahomey and so forth, it was astonishing what a premium they set on English professional talent; a man with just a smattering of medicine might rise to the highest distinctions in almost no time; accumulate thousands (in cowries), and even get made prime minister if he liked it. Then, only think what influence he'd have! what power of doing good on a large scale! providing only he didn't bother himself with missionary humbug, and trying to upset the theology of the natives and all that. He might marry a king's daughter if he liked, (only, of course, he wouldn't). And if he

merely stuck to the Flora of the country, or went out with his gun, and sent home dried specimens, or wrote a book, putting plenty of red in the brush—he'd, net a pretty penny!

When George talked in this way, Eleanor never thought of contradicting him. A lucid interval always succeeded.

Meanwhile, the two elder ladies were amicably busied at their needles, and not altogether idle with their tongues.

"How kind it is of you, Miss Clairvaux," began Mrs. Graydon gratefully, "to give me and my children this treat!"

"Kind to myself," said Miss Clairvaux, "I enjoy it nearly as much as you can."

"That is because you have so kind a heart. There are very few people who would have thought of it."

"Ah well, it would not make me the happier to think that. I hope there are a great many people who like to make others

happy—and I think there are. Only look at our newspapers, and see how readily and munificently cases of distress are relieved as soon as they are made known."

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Graydon.

After a short silence, Miss Clairvaux resumed,

"Your son is a very promising young man."

"He is a very good, dear boy," said his mother, "I only wish he had a little more manner."

"Perhaps that will come with time. Brusquerie is undesirable, especially in a medical man, and yet young students are sometimes misguided enough to cultivate it. But, where there is good taste, they generally grow out of it, instead of letting it grow on them. George has such good models in his mother and sister that he will doubtless be influenced by them."

"Ah! I am no model," said Mrs. Gray-

don; "but I influence him as much as I can, in a quiet way."

"A quiet way is the best. Do you look forward with much anxiety to his future?"

"Where is the use? he has had a good start, and must make his way like other young men who have only themselves to depend upon. Luckily he has secured Mr. Franklin's esteem, so that if any opening occurs, he may speak a good word for him."

"What sort of opening, for instance?"

"Oh, as assistant to some country practitioner. Or he might go out in some ship."

As Miss Clairvaux had nothing more brilliant to propose, she was glad Mrs. Graydon seemed contented.

"You cannot think," pursued Mrs. Graydon, "how much obliged to you I am for taking dear Eleanor off my hands. Of course I feel the separation, but it is so much better and happier for her to be with you than to be a governess, and really, if she had remained

at home, only writing magazine stories, and painting little things for the fancy shops, we should have done very badly. I can get on without her, but with her we should have been pinched. So that, you see, reconciles me to her loss."

"Certainly it must," said Miss Clairvaux energetically. "Besides, you know, the separation would be equally great if she were to marry."

"Ah, *that* is a separation," said Mrs. Graydon, quietly smiling, "that most mothers contrive to reconcile themselves to."

Miss Clairvaux worked for a few minutes in silence, but her thoughts were busy. At length she said, rather abruptly changing the subject—

"Mr. Debenham seems to have taken quite a fancy to George. He is a kind-hearted man—"

"Very, he appears to be," said Mrs. Graydon.

"A good man," pursued Miss Clairvaux, "and he was a very good husband: his wife died about two years ago."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Graydon civilly, but without much interest.

"He has two nice little boys," continued Miss Clairvaux. "Orderly well-behaved little fellows; and, you know, they are a good deal at school."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Graydon.

"I should not think they would be much of an objection, if Mr. Debenham were to think of a second marriage?" said Miss Clairvaux.

"Why should they be?" said Mrs. Graydon.

"Just so; why should they be?" echoed Miss Clairvaux. "A warm-hearted, affectionate person would soon attach herself to them, and attach them to her."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Graydon. "Is Mr. Debenham meditating a second marriage?"

"Really I don't know what he is meditating," said Miss Clairvaux, "but, at his time of life, you know, it is not at all unlikely."

"Oh dear no," said Mrs. Graydon.

"In fact he is quite in the prime of life. And a most respectable, estimable man. I don't know how it has happened, but I have seen more of him lately than usual."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Graydon.

"If —" said Miss Clairvaux boldly, after another pause, "he and Eleanor should ever think of one another—"

"Eleanor is bespoken," said Mrs. Graydon, quietly.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux with a violent start. "I never was more surprised in my life! sly little thing! she never dropped me a hint of it!"

"Why, no," replied Mrs. Graydon, "it is hardly likely she should—you see, it requires a little explanation."

"Do explain," said Miss Clairvaux impatiently.

"In dear Mr. Graydon's lifetime," said Mrs. Graydon, laying down her work, and looking very serious, "there was a nice, clever young man, boy I should rather say, put under him as pupil, by the name of Maurice Day. He was a far greater genius than my dear husband, though he wanted direction, and he finished by getting the Royal Academy medal, and being sent out to Italy, free of expense, for three years. That was about eighteen months ago. But, before he went, I should tell you, he fell in love with Eleanor. They were quite too young to enter into any regular engagement, even on that score only; and Mr. Graydon, seeing how things were, spoke very plainly to him on the subject, and said, 'I insist on it, Maurice, that you don't name love to Eleanor—you owe it to me, and you owe it to her.' But, however that might be, he *looked* love if he did not

name it, and you cannot blame the poor girl if she felt it. Not a word passed, however, to the best of my knowledge, though his manner towards her told everything; and, at last, when he was on the point of starting for Italy, he came to Mr. Graydon, and said, 'Mr. Graydon, you must let me speak now—I have forborne all this while, but I cannot any longer. You must let me go away engaged.' My husband said no—he would not hear of it. Maurice might change his mind; or, if he did not, his prospects were uncertain, and he would not let Eleanor be fettered, and her peace disturbed by any promises. Maurice said, 'well, if *she* may not promise, you cannot hinder *me* from promising, and I *do* promise to consider myself engaged to her, and to come back and claim her at the end of three years; and *if* I do, will you not give her to me, sir, *then*?' My husband said that if he then found himself in a position to marry, he would not say

no. So Maurice went on that, and if ever looks spoke, I think his spoke to Eleanor when he went away, though he did not say a word. It unsettled her a good deal, poor thing—she was very young and tender, you know; but I must say for her, she was very good about it; and when I said, 'Eleanor, it is plain to see Maurice is very sorry to leave you, but he will soon get over it, and you know you are both quite too young to have any serious thoughts yet,' she took it very nicely, and got over it, and soon went on just as if nothing had happened. And I think, Miss Clairvaux, girls would oftener get over these things if their friends spoke to them sympathizingly and frankly; at the right moment, you know, instead of shutting their grief up in their heart, and letting it harden there. But then came dear Mr. Graydon's death; and, as soon as Maurice heard of it, he wrote from Rome, direct to Eleanor, deploring the event in the strongest terms,

and only wishing he were rich, and I know not what all, that his dearest Eleanor might know the affection of her own Maurice."

"Dear me, I wonder she could stand out against that!" exclaimed Miss Clairvaux.

"I think the letter consoled her and me too, more than anything else could, but still, there was nothing like an engagement, because, though he said, *do* answer me, I said, if you do, you will act contrary to your papa's wish, and the three years are half over already, and the other half will soon be gone; and if his love will not last through another eighteen months, it cannot be worth having. The dear girl took it all very well; and I let her send a kind message to him through his sister, who was going out to spend the winter with him; and on this, I hope, his love will snstain itself for the remainder of the time, for I could not see my way clear to allowing a correspondence, after what Mr. Graydon said. He

said it might entangle *her* without securing *him.*"

Here was an unexpected end to Miss Clairvaux's fine *château en Espagne!*

"Well," said she at length, after drawing a long breath that seemed very much like a sigh, "all's well that ends well, and I hope this will end well. You really think him a nice young man?"

"O yes, only in fact, owing to his position as my husband's pupil, I never looked upon him as a young man *at all*, only as a boy—a clever boy, who was likely to get quite ahead of my dear husband."

"Precisely. And has he been going on well since he went abroad?"

"I have no means of knowing."

"You think his principles good?"

"He had been well brought up, but had never been much tried. I could not feel sure of his turning out steady."

"Ha!"

And Miss Clairvaux fell into reverie.

"Better not say anything about it to Eleanor," said Mrs. Graydon rather anxiously.

"O, no, certainly not: I have nothing to say. Only somehow I seem to see her in quite a new light, now I think of her as engaged."

"She is *not* engaged."

"Just so. Only 'bespoken,' as you said. Well, I hope it may all turn out for her happiness. He will hardly be able to marry at the end of the three years, I should think? He must form connexions, get commissions and so on, before he can make any money?"

"Yes; but he has had some commissions already."

"Oh indeed!—No doubt he is clever."

"I hear George's voice," said Mrs. Graydon looking up. "Yes, here they come."

CHAPTER XIII.

The country is lyric—the town dramatic. When united, they form the most perfect musical drama.

LONGFELLOW.

MRS. DEBENHAM'S tea-party might be perfection as a tea-party, but its zest to Miss Clairvaux was gone. She had anticipated it as another stepping-stone to a very promising preference, and lo! her house of cards had fallen to the ground at a breath.

"No more than I deserve!" said she, with self-disgust. "What business had I to ape vulgar mammas, who try to push common

politeness into liking, and common liking into a proposal? These Graydons showed far more delicacy, and I dare say the young man is a thousand times better suited for Eleanor than Mr. Debenham is. Only, it may all come to nothing. Well, and what then?"

Still, Miss Clairvaux was a little disappointed; was less disposed even to accord Mr. Debenham her usual measure of justice, now that a lively young rival, say of twenty-two, started up beside the prosaic country gentleman of forty-three; and when Mr. Debenham joined the circle in his mother's drawing-room, he spoke of the weather as "bilious;" alluded to his digestion; and looked, Miss Clairvaux thought, older than usual; so that she wondered how she could have expected Eleanor to be prepossessed in his favour.

The party was not improved, to her mind, by the addition of Mrs. Plover, who said

studied things about the pleasure it gave her to see her in society, and the hope she entertained that Miss Clairvaux would soon be prevailed on to extend the favour of her company to herself. And when Miss Clairvaux thanked her, but said that she made it a rule not to go out, she said, "Oh, but every rule has its exceptions, and you have departed from it now," which was true enough, and Miss Clairvaux was already repenting that she had done so. But when she looked around and saw how Eleanor, George, and Mr. Debenham were enjoying a hearty laugh together, and how comfortably Mrs. Debenham and Mrs. Graydon had settled into a chat: "surely," thought she, "there must be some neutral ground for Mrs. Plover and me somewhere or other, on which we may be happily agreed like the rest," and she exerted herself to find it; with so much success that Mrs. Plover was very well pleased, till inadvertently they got upon

infant schools, on which their opinions were strong, but unfortunately opposite.

At this juncture, the company seasonably received an addition in the benign old rector, Dr. Hurst, who was followed by Mr. and Mrs. Burrowes and Mrs. Rowe.

"This is the way a party rolls up," thought Miss Clairvaux. "I have been told more than once how Mrs. Debenham goes from one to another, saying 'you will only meet so-and-so,' forgetting that they are all to meet one another."

"Well, Miss Clairvaux," said Mr. Burrowes, sitting down beside her with a genial smile on his cheerful, handsome face, "so you have come out among us at last! I'm glad of it; it will do you good."

"Thank you; but this is only an exceptional case."

"Oh! but we can't hear of exceptional cases. We all owe something to society. Even I, you see, busy as I am, acknowledge

my debt to it. I assure you, it required some effort to leave my own fire-side this evening, after such a day as I have had; but I heard we were to meet you."

"You are very kind. Pray is it true that there has been a case of diphtheria near the Green Pond?"

"Not a word of truth in it. Only a common sore throat. Oh! Miss Clairvaux, when I come out to enjoy an hour with my friends, I like to leave diphtheria and croup, and all those things, behind me."

"Well, it is but fair that you should."

"Yes, indeed a man requires it. He must not carry the sick-room about with him. I said so to Mr. Newland to-day. I wish I could bring you and Newland together. Quite a superior mind. But nothing can induce him to admit a petticoat into the house. By the by, are you not pleased that Dick's daughter, Martha White, is set afloat again?"

"Yes, I am, indeed, though I fear she will not long keep out of difficulties. I was quite surprised; I understand it has been all your doing."

"I have been only another person's almoner," said Mr. Burrowes, "I mention no names, of course. I was empowered to do the best for her that could be done, so I put her into that cottage near the Green Pond, got her some lodgers, found her some laundry-work, and bought her a mangle. If she does not go straight now, she never will."

"No, I think not. You have been most judiciously kind to her."

"All with another person's money. It is easy to be kind in that way."

"Ah, some persons can find money, and others sense to apply it. Large bequests, magnificent donations, often do less good than they might, because the donors do not know how to turn them to the best account."

"There's something still left for you to do—

to get Jane, the girl of fourteen, into a place."

"It is difficult to find a suitable place for a girl of that sort. But I will bear her in mind, for she will do no good at home."

"Well, have you had any nice books down from Mudie lately? My wife wants me to subscribe, and I believe I shall on her account, but really I have no time for reading, except in my chaise. At the end of the day, I'm too sleepy; and then there's the Times."

Miss Clairvaux was surprised, at the end of the evening, to find how pleasantly it had passed. Her resolution, however, of not being drawn into the regular round of Meadowleigh parties, was by no means shaken. This was the Graydons' last evening together, for the mother and son were to return to London the following afternoon, after an early dinner; but George had thus the opportunity of another early walk with Eleanor, and another ride on the pony. Mr.

Debenham's last remark to him was, "Well, I suppose we shall have you here again in the shooting season," and George's answer, "I only hope, sir, you may!"—at which Miss Clairvaux smiled.

Eleanor returned from her walk with George in time to have a final chat with her mother, and was disappointed enough, therefore, to find Mrs. Plover aud Mrs. Rowe making a morning call, alleging the simplicity of the country as an excuse for the earliness of the hour. The curiosity of the country would have been nearer the truth. They had learnt, the previous evening, that Mrs. Graydon and her son would leave by the 2.30 train, and had therefore decided on intercepting them. Whatever Eleanor's feelings might be, Mrs. Graydon had so little change at home that she was pleased at this incident, and chatted to the visitors' content, though they deplored afterwards

that they had only made out she lived "within an easy walk of the hospitals."

These worthy ladies stayed so long, and gave so little signal of moving, that Miss Clairvaux was at length driven to, "Well, I am obliged to say that if we dine before my friends leave, we must dine now"—on which, wordy apologies ensued, and the ladies sailed off. Even then, George did not come in till they were at table, having availed himself of Gimcrack's services to the very last. Then there came a cheerful, hurried dinner, and a bustle after it, Miss Clairvaux being the last ready, because she was packing some little dainties for town consumption into a basket.

They were awaiting her in the drawing-room, within five minutes of the time to start, when there was a ring at the door-bell, and, directly afterwards, Claudia, looking unutterable things, announced—

"Mr. Horsefield!"

Eleanor started and looked round, and in walked Mr. Horsefield, attired much more smartly than on the former occasion.

There was a dash of the sportsman in his costume; though it was only the season for the Epping hunt, and his gloves, necktie, and waistcoat were obtrusively gay, while his watchguard and studs seemed to have been bought at the Lowther Arcade. His hair was shining and streaky, and as Longfellow says, "went off to the left in a superb sweep, like the handrail of a banister;" but altogether he looked rather less of a gentleman than he had done in his ordinary dress. He entered with a mixture of effrontery and embarrassment, but the latter predominated when he unexpectedly found himself in the presence of strangers; and with a sheepish "good morning, ma'am," to Eleanor, which she responded to by a very distant curtsey, he turned to the window and looked out, then threw herself into a chair, pulled off one

glove, and began flicking his boot with his smart little riding whip.

"Fine morning, sir," said he presently to George.

"Very," said George, with a slight glance at Eleanor which Mr. Horsefield intercepted and construed as ironical.

"Nice weather for riding, sir," said Mr. Horsefield.

"Very," said George emphatically. "I've had a capital ride this morning."

"Ah," said Mr. Horsefield. "You keep a horse, then?"

What's that to you? thought George.

"I wish I knew somebody that would lend me one," pursued Mr. Horsefield.

"Oh," said George, glancing at his whip, "I thought you had been riding. Ah, people are not always very fond of lending their horses."

"Come, George, *you've* no reason to complain," said Mrs. Graydon.

"Quite the reverse," said George. "Mine was only a general observation."

"General observation with particular application, sir?" said Mr. Horsefield rather fiercely.

"Not at all," said George with suavity. At this instant Miss Clairvaux appeared in the doorway, and stood there without advancing.

"To what am I indebted for this call, Mr. Horsefield?" said she.

"Oh, good morning, ma'am," said Mr. Horsefield, turning round and bowing. "I didn't know you was engaged with company in the house, or would have taken another occasion. However, if you'll oblige me with five minutes in the next room—"

"Quite impossible, Mr. Horsefield, the railway waits for no man, or woman either."

"Three minutes will do, Miss Clairvaux, or two, if you are in a hurry. You have only just got to sign—" And he drew out a paper.

"Quite impossible, Mr. Horsefield. I never sign anything in a hurry, I never sign anything unread; and the paper in question I am quite determined never to sign at all."

"But, ma'am, you don't even know—"

"I don't desire to know. I know this, which is quite sufficient, that I have no business affairs in hand to require my signing at all; and I do not desire to have any. Good morning."

As Mr. Horsefield still stood his ground, George began to look defiant, which the other observing, resented, though he took up his hat.

"I must say, Miss Clairvaux," said he, "that this is very extraordinary conduct—"

"Not at all," said Miss Clairvaux. "I am, as you see, on the point of starting to the station, and have no time to lose, therefore must speak to the point—"

"Oh, well, but I can wait, or call again."

"To no purpose; and I cannot think of your waiting here. I have already said, I refuse to sign that or any paper. You must really let me say good morning now, Mr. Horsefield, or we shall lose the train; and so will you."

"Oh, very well, good morning ma'am, good morning, since you won't hear a word I have to say—I can only report it—it's no matter of mine, I wash my hands of it. You may be sorry, perhaps—"

"Do you threaten Miss Clairvaux, sir?" said George sternly.

"No, sir, I don't threaten her," rejoined Mr. Horsefield, exasperated, "and I don't at all know you, sir, nor what affair it is of yours, and advise you to keep out of it—"

"George, George," said Mrs. Graydon pacifically, as George put on a terrific look. The look, however, answered its purpose, for Mr. Horsefield, ducking his head, said:

"I wish you all a very good morning—

it's no treat to me to come here, I assure you, and only in the way of business, but the lady needn't have reminded me about the train, for I may have other business in the town, and not want to go back yet."

"Certainly," said Miss Clairvaux, making way for him to pass, and giving the most distant inclination of her head to him as he did so. "And now, my dear friends, we have no time to lose," said she, as the gate closed after him.

There was, indeed, so much danger of losing the train, that all was hurry till they reached the station, and not another word passed about Mr. Horsefield, whose business was naturally understood to be of a private and vexatious nature.

Whizz!—puff! puff!—they were off; and Eleanor, after watching the white wreath till it was lost behind an embankment, turned away with tearful eyes but a bright smile, and sliding her hand within Miss Clairvaux's

arm, pressed it, saying, "Dear Miss Clairvaux! how happy you have made us all!"

"That is just what I meant to do," said Miss Clairvaux, "and in making you so, I made myself so."

"It was *such* a treat! May I—might I venture to ask how you like George?"

"I think him a capital fellow."

"Oh, I am so glad!"

"And I like your mother, Eleanor, very much indeed."

"I am still more glad."

"I am sorry you should be obliged to live apart; but at present, seemingly, it cannot be helped."

"No; and she says you have alleviated the pain of the separation so much by letting her come here and see what everything is like, and what you are like, and how much I have to make me contented, and grateful, and happy. She says it lessens the distance."

"Well, I can fancy that. It occurred to

me that it would do so. You will feel a little flat, I dare say, for a day or two—"

"O no, not at all!" And in her desire to show she did not, Eleanor found a thousand ways of being active and useful on her return home, and finished by walking into the town afterwards, to pay a little bill for pastry and hot cross buns at Mr. Brownjohn's; for Miss Clairvaux never allowed bills to run up.

"Well," said Miss Clairvaux, yawning a little as the supper-hour approached, "I do not think we shall infringe the early closing system to-night. It does people good sometimes to be shaken up; but when they are at my time of life, they soon settle down again! Like that elderly opera-dancer, of whom Macklin said, 'That lady, sir, goes up very high; but she comes down very heavy.' Everything has gone off pleasantly; except, by-the-by, that visit of Mr. Horsefield."

"He gained nothing by coming," said

Eleanor, "so that may be said to have gone off pleasantly, too."

"No, my dear, nothing can be pleasant in which he is concerned. He is a disagreeable little fellow."

"He was still in the town when I went into it," said Eleanor.

"*Was* he? What could he want down here? Was he looking about him, admiring the place, like a cockney with an excursion ticket?"

"No, I think he must have had business of some sort. He whisked out of Fidgeon's into Taplow's shop without seeing me."

"He might go to Taplow's to buy buns, as my cold meat was not forthcoming," said Miss Clairvaux. "I can't conceive, though, what he could want at Fidgeon's. Not mops or scrubbing-brushes, surely. And he would hardly come all the way from London to buy a toothbrush."

"He had been at Lashbrook's," said

Eleanor, after a pause, "for while I was paying for the sausages, Mr. Lashbrook rummaged for a fourpenny piece, that he might not trouble me with halfpence, saying, 'I know I took one this morning,' and then went into the little room at the back, and his wife said rather crossly, I thought, 'oh, I paid it away while Mr. Horsefield was here.'"

"Hum—that's curious," said Miss Clairvaux. "And yet I don't know why I should say so, for he may have relations down here, you know, as well as anywhere else. At any rate, acquaintance. I know nothing of him; and want to know nothing."

"He could hardly have expected you to sign a paper without reading it."

"There is no knowing what some people will *not* expect, for they often expect most extraordinary things. But he might expect that long enough of me, without my doing it. I know what was in the paper; at least, I have good reason to think I do. Mr.

Foljambe wants me to let him sell some property in which we have a joint interest, contrary to the dispositions of his father's will; and I will not do it. He says he might make a much better investment of his share, and that I might do so too; but I do not think so; and having said so, why cannot he be content?"

CHAPTER XIV.

Our passions never wholly die; but in the last cantos of life's romantic epos, they rise up again and do battle, like some of Ariosto's heroes, who have already been quietly interred, and ought to be turned to dust.

LONGFELLOW.

ELEANOR certainly felt rather flat the next day, in spite of a cheerful letter from her mother; and she was glad, therefore, when Miss Clairvaux, in the course of the afternoon, sent her on an errand which took her to the spirit-reviving uplands.

Miss Clairvaux was busy repacking her

old-fashioned plate, when Claudia told her Mr. Debenham was down stairs. She, therefore, hastily closed the lid over her valuables and went down to see him. It struck her, as she entered the drawing-room, that he was looking about him rather disconsolately.

"All alone again, you see!" said she.

"So I see," said he, quite cheerfully. "What, has Miss Graydon gone home with her mother?"

"Oh no, she is walking."

"She is making quite a long stay with you."

"This is her home at present." (As well give him a hint how matters stand, thought she).

"Oh, indeed! that must be a very pleasant arrangement for you. My mother and I have often thought you must feel dull."

"There you were quite mistaken, I have never once felt so."

"Well, I wonder you did not, and timid too, at night."

"Why should I?"

"Oh, houses are broken open sometimes."

"Really, I don't think it very neighbourly of you to come and frighten me!"

He laughed and owned it was not. "However," said he, "to frighten you would probably be a difficult matter, for I dare say you know how to fire a gun."

"No, I never fired a gun, though I have cleaned one. And though I have an old musket in the house, I have neither powder nor shot."

"Well, you might point it, as though it were loaded. That might do as well."

"Better. I should not like to kill a man."

"You should have a rattle."

"What, like an old watchman? the very echo of feebleness and helplessness. To spring a rattle would be to invite the rogues to persist in their roguery. Who would hear it?"

"Well, perhaps, a good loud bell would be better. That might perhaps be heard in the town."

"'Swinging slow with solemn roar.' I have one, and rang it the night of the fire, but to what good? Dick's cottage was burnt to the ground long before the engine came. This is too bad of you. I was not frightened, never had been so, before you came, but you will finish by making me so."

"O, Miss Clairvaux!"

"You will, indeed. You make me feel how helpless I am."

"Oh, I'm quite sorry. I had no idea of that. All I was saying was, how pleasant it must be to you to have Miss Graydon to stay with you for a permanence (I think you said for a permanence), it must prevent your feeling so lonely."

"Ah yes, we began with Miss Graydon. I did not say she was here for a permanence, I said this was at present her home."

"Just so, the same thing in other words: I don't see a bit of difference."

"But there *is* a difference," persisted Miss Clairvaux, "because, don't you see? she may be here to-day and gone to-morrow. Supposing her to marry, for example, this would be her home to-day, but not for a permanence."

"Just so, only that hardly seemed to me a supposable case."

"Why not?" cried Miss Clairvaux. "Why, who do you see here to make it supposable? you see no society."

"Oh, that is nothing to the purpose," said Miss Clairvaux, laughing heartily, "nothing at all to the purpose, I assure you."

"Well, I should have thought it must have been," said he, looking mystified. "Unless she were engaged when she came."

"Ah, that is a very clever 'unless' of yours; only, mind, I don't tell you it is so."

"*Is* it though? Come, now, do tell me."

"Nonsense, what right have you to any curiosity on the subject?"

"None, certainly," said Mr. Debenham, laughing, "only I should be glad to hear that such a nice, pretty girl was likely to be well married."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" thought Miss Clairvaux. And there was nothing in his look or manner to make her doubt his perfect sincerity.

"Ah well," said she, "curiosity about our neighbours' affairs ought sedulously to be discouraged, and I have not a word of information to give you on the subject. Eleanor is one of a thousand, and will, I have no doubt, soon or late find some one who will do full justice to her good qualities; but she is no fortune, Mr. Debenham. He who chooses her, must choose her for herself."

"And no bad look-out either," said Mr. Debenham. "Only, unfortunately, the mar-

rying men of the present day are such mercenary dogs!"

There was bathos in this conclusion of the subject! Plainly he had no more thought of personal interest in it than the man in the moon; and Miss Clairvaux changed the conversation with a twist that was almost a wrench, by beginning to talk of one or other of the oppressed nationalities.

Mr. Debenham had taken his leave some time before Eleanor returned, but yet, when she came home, there was a man's voice in the house. Claudia, looking full of awe, said as she admitted her, "Mr. Foljambe is here." Eleanor simply said "oh," and instead of going at once to Miss Clairvaux in the drawing-room, went up to her own room, where she could still hear voices beneath. They seemed raised a little, but not much, above the tone of equable conversation: gradually, however, they became louder, as if in altercation; and, at length, there was

something like a sharp cry of pain, and Miss Clairvaux, coming to the door, cried aloud:

"Eleanor! Eleanor! are you come home? Come down to me directly!"

"Here I am, dear Miss Clairvaux! what is it?" cried Eleanor with a sudden thrill of terror; and she hastily ran down stairs. Miss Clairvaux, who was standing in the passage, preceded her into the room, saying in a tone almost defiant, "You will see I am not so lonely aud unprotected as you suppose." A deep red colour had flushed to her temples, and she was evidently in strong emotion.

Eleanor, whose heart beat wildly, followed her close, and looked at Mr. Foljambe, who stood before the fire in true John Bull attitude. But, though his posture was English, there was nothing in his face of the frankness, the honesty of the Englishman. He was a well-preserved, handsome-looking man, but with as sinister an eye, and as treacherous a

mouth as Titian has given Philip the Second.

He moved his eyes without moving his head as Eleanor entered, and, though he looked surprised and uncomfortable, he calmly said:

"Who is this young person?"

"This young lady is my guest—has been so for some time," said Miss Clairvaux, exerting strong mastery over herself, "and I have no concealments from her. Eleanor! this gentleman—Mr. Foljambe—has come down here to compel my signature to that paper; if not by persuasion and argument, then by threats and by force."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"Pooh, pooh," said Mr. Foljambe.

"*You have*," said Miss Clairvaux with flashing eyes. "Was a strait waiscoat no threat? Did you not squeeze my wrist, and say you would have no nonsense?"

"Oh, dreadful, dreadful," exclaimed Eleanor.

"You are making a fine mess of it," said he impatiently. "Miss —— I have not the pleasure of knowing your name, nor do I know anything you have to do with the present affair—your friend here, Miss Clairvaux, who, I acknowledge, has been acting like a madwoman, though I never called her one, has been deaf to all argument, all persuasion on a matter nearly concerning us both, and I certainly did go so far as to say, in a loose sort of way, that a person so deaf to reason must be only fit for a strait waiscoat—rather a strong figure, doubtless, but used under irritation —"

"He wanted me," burst forth Miss Clairvaux, "to sign away my entire interest in the property without reading the deed—"

"Pooh, pooh—"

"And when I sat down as if to sign it, but began to read it first, he took my wrist with one hand, and laid the other on the paper, saying 'I will have no nonsense—'"

"Pooh, pooh—"

"You *did*, false man! because you thought I was alone in the house!"

"Is it at all likely?" said Mr. Foljambe, much moved, and appealing to Eleanor. "Does not it carry improbability on the face of it?"

"Indeed, sir, this—"

"See for yourself," he continued, waving his hand towards Miss Clairvaux, "under what excitement she labours—look at her swelling veins, her flushed complexion, her eyes starting out of her head—"

"Sir, sir!—"

"And tell me whether she looks like a sane woman. The fact is, painful as it is to state it, that there is insanity in her family—"

"False, false, Jasper Foljambe!" cried Miss Clairvaux indignantly.

"Perfectly true, I assure you," said he, shrugging his shoulders, and addressing

Eleanor with studied softness and self-command, "Her father drowned himself."

"Oh, that I should hear this!" groaned Miss Clairvaux.

"Hear this?" cried he, with sudden passion, turning sharp round upon her, "aye, and you will hear much more and worse than this, if you persist in acting in this insane way—"

"Eleanor! do you hear how he threatens me?"

"Mr. Foljambe," said Eleanor, looking steadily at him, though she trembled like a leaf, "it seems to me quite a simple thing, since you say Miss Clairvaux has mistaken the purport of the deed, to let her and me read it through quietly, and see if she has done so—"

"Oh, the idea!" said he contemptuously. "What should you know of law?"

"Whatever may be the value of my opinion," said Eleanor, "I am at least entitled to form one."

"I deny the premisses."

"Let Mr. Debenham, then, look it over for Miss Clairvaux."

"Who is Mr. Debenham?" said Mr. Foljambe, evidently uneasy. "I never heard of him before."

"He is a disinterested, spirited man, and a friend on whose judgment Miss Clairvaux can depend."

"Mr. Debenham is nothing to me, and I don't see what spirit has to do with it. Oh, I am completely wasting my time here, and I shall have no more bother. It is your own fault, Alicia, if I put the matter into proper hands."

"That is precisely what you had better do," said Miss Clairvaux, "things are always best put into proper hands. There are no hands, however, that can compel me to sign a deed without reading it."

"Pooh, pooh! you might have read it, you know perfectly well; but you have made

it a matter of temper now, and I have my temper, too—a pretty strong one. Well, I am sorry for this. You have completely exposed yourself."

And without another word, he walked out of the room and out of the house.

"*He* has exposed himself, I think," ejaculated Eleanor. "What a man!"

Miss Clairvaux burst into tears.

"Oh! Eleanor," said she, as the young girl put her arm round her, "what a tower of strength you were! How could you face him so?"

"I hardly know," said Eleanor between laughing and crying, "I am astonished at myself, like Katterfelto."

"How you came down upon him with Mr. Debenham! It really was very droll, if it were not so shocking!" And Miss Clairvaux laughed hysterically, and then cried again. "It was like pricking a bladder—he immediately collapsed!"

"A man cannot really be brave who is so easily frightened at the mere name of another man," said Eleanor. "I had no idea Mr. Debenham's name would prove so powerful an ally."

"My dear, bullies are never brave. And his being so frightened showed the badness of his cause. He guesses Mr. Debenham to be a lawyer, and dares not let him see the deed."

"He must be a very bad man," said Eleanor, "what dreadful things he said!"

"And so wickedly false! You know, Eleanor, I told you about my poor father's death. I know all about it that Jasper does; he was 'found drowned'—there was an inquest, of course, and that was the verdict. I was an infant at the time, and so was Jasper; but I heard all about it afterwards from my mother. Mr. Clairvaux was a young man universally beloved; he had merely gone to visit a dying person one dark evening,

and, coming home, missed his footing and walked into the river. There was not a shadow of truth in Jasper's wicked imputation. Oh! how fond he must be of money to go such lengths for it, and all for himself, for he has neither wife nor child living! True, he wants to invest his own money as well as mine in the same concern; and, therefore, thinks well of it; but to get the management of my principal into his own hands would be to make me still more dependent on him than I am already."

"I am sorry you should be dependent on him at all," said Eleanor.

"Aye, so am I. You see, my dear, it is really a very painful case. My step-father, dear Mr. Foljambe, was as good a man as ever breathed; but he had his crotchets: we all have. Now, one of his crotchets was about my father. He did not feel quite sure that he had not drowned himself: I mean, wilfully. Perhaps Jasper fostered this idea in him.

He dwelt upon this latterly, when his own mind was weakening, and persuaded himself that no man would do such a thing who was right in his mind, and that the tendency might be hereditary, and that, therefore, my father's daughter might inherit it. And, therefore, this dear, good man, with the best intentions, mind you, left me the property which is the chief of my income, independent of any control, unless in the event of my becoming deranged; and then it was to be admistered for me by Jasper."

"Oh! that was a most unfortunate proviso!" said Eleanor.

"Indeed it was; because, though I hope and pray that I may never be in that pitiable case, yet Jasper, you see, has a reason for wishing it, and a reason for trying to bring it to pass."

"Can a man be so wicked?"

"My dear Eleanor! can any one with the slightest knowledge of history, or who even

sees the daily papers, doubt of the possibility of *any* wickedness? I hope and pray, however, that this wickedness may not be in Jasper. Yes, I both hope *and* pray."

"What did he mean, I wonder," said Eleanor, uneasily, "about putting the affair now into proper hands?"

"Oh, that was an idle threat," said Miss Clairvaux. "You had so completely posed him with Mr. Debenham, that he felt he must say something, and so said that; but it could be nothing but an idle threat. What is there to put in anybody's hands? He might cajole or threaten me into doing a thing I had no mind to, but it would not stand the light of day, and there would be nothing he would in reality have more reason to dread than publicity. Men domineer over us poor women often enough, when they can do it with impunity; but happily, for us, they have a salutary fear of one another. How you *did* fire up, to be sure! I wish your mother

could have seen you. Are you going to write to her, this evening?"

"Do you wish me to do so?"

"Why, yes, I think I do. I read characters pretty accurately, and I think your mother has discretion. Tell her the story without reserves. I think she will feel for me; and for you."

Eleanor did so; and then showed her letter to Miss Clairvaux, who was quite satisfied with her own place in it.

"Yes," said she, returning it to her, "that will do very nicely. You have told the whole affair 'out of the face,' as the Irish say; and really, it ought to be known to somebody, or, in case Jasper finds some new way of assailing me, where am I? My dear, I feel sadly shaken by this business. Do play me something to compose me, as David used to compose Saul."

"What will you have?" said Eleanor sitting down to the piano.

"Oh, anything but a galop or a polka. Something lulling and quieting."

So Eleanor, after a moment's thought, began to play Mendelssohn's Overture to the Midsummer Night's Dream. Does my reader know it? Let me tell him what there is in it. Firstly, Shakspeare draws four long deep breaths, for it is *Shakspeare's* dream, yon are aware; and he has fallen asleep

On summer eve, by haunted stream.

This stream ripples over pebbles; you hear it, he hears it, almost all the way through; and a large blue-bottle fly having entangled himself in a spider's web close to the sleeper's ear, commences humming and fighting with extraordinary vigour, till the tiny hubbub ridiculously seems to the dreamer like a squabble between two elfin sprites, and lo! Oberon and Titania are quarrelling and rating each other in good set terms. A shepherd boy wending homewards, trills a rustic

roundelay: you hear it in the overture, Shakspeare hears it in his dream, and forthwith dreams of Athenian clowns and their interlude—a donkey brays behinds the hedge, and straightway "Bottom is translated.' But these brief interruptions die away, and again we have the water musically rippling and the captive fly buzzing, and again fairies trip lightly through the dream, which grows deeper and more fantastic till the sleeper becomes insensible of external sounds. So then we have Titania's fooling, and Oberon's forgiveness, and lovers losing themselves in woods and fogs, and stately wedding-trains and awkward country merriment; and just as all seems merry as a marriage bell—the spell breaks, and with two or three long luxurious sighs, the dreamer wakes!

All this and more would Miss Clairvaux's fancy have conjured up while Mendelssohn's sweet music lasted, had it not been jangled and out of time. Instead of which, she only

gave an impatient sigh and said, "that won't do."

"Perhaps I can think of something that will do better," said Eleanor after a pause, and then she began slowly and plaintively to play the first movement of Rossini's Stabat Mater, wherein one can even hear the sad mother's sobs.

"Oh no, that's worse!" interrupted Miss Clairvaux, putting her hands to her ears. "It affects me quite too much! Oh Eleanor, my love, I am ashamed to be so wayward and childish."

"You are neither, dear Miss Clairvaux," said Eleanor, leaving the piano, "only your nerves have been jarred. Let me read something to you."

"Aye, do."

"Poetry or prose?"

"Poetry, I think."

As Eleanor knew that Miss Clairvaux admired Evangeline, and had not read Hiawatha,

she ventured to begin it, and was secretly congratulating herself on the success of her choice, when Miss Clairvaux half-penitently said:

"My dear girl, it is a shame to go on. I have not heard one word!"

"Ah. then," said Eleanor, immediately putting her book aside, "do not let us force thoughts any longer. I was thinking of Hiawatha no more than you were, so it is a good thing you stopped me."

"'Words, words, words,' as poor Hamlet said—by the way, what a singular character his was, poor fellow. I speak of him as if he had lived and felt as Shakspeare made him!" observed Miss Clairvaux. "How apt we are to do that! Did Shakspeare mean him to be really mad or not? that's the puzzle. Mr. Foljambe would say yes; I say no."

"Please do not let us talk any more of that disagreeable Mr. Foljambe."

"No, we will send him to Coventry. Tasso, again, was he mad?"

"O no, surely!"

"He did not deserve to be put into St. Anne's amid the sounds of lashes and chains. By the way, how horribly they used lunatics then—what secrets stone walls could tell!—but he laboured under strange though innocent delusions latterly."

"Shakspeare might have made as good a play of him as of Hamlet," said Eleanor.

"My dear, what are you thinking of? he lived after Shakspeare."

"O yes, to be sure! what *could* I be thinking of? I wonder whether Leonora really cared for him."

"It is heresy to doubt it," said Miss Clairvaux. "Probably, however, hers was a much less impassioned affection than his. She was calm, and good, and gentle, and doomed to a premature death. And doubtless, in spite of all his woes, he felt that

> "'Twas better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all."

"Is that your own theory, Miss Clairvaux?"

"Yes, my dear, it is. You must not think, however, I could tell you a romantic story if I would. 'A blank, my lord!'"

Eleanor, remembering the legend annexed to that blank, however, questioned whether Miss Clairvaux were in this instance to be strictly believed any more than Viola.

CHAPTER XV.

My garden, painted o'er
With Nature's hand, not Art's, can pleasures yield
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

NEXT morning, Mr. Foljambe's visit seemed more like a bad dream than a reality. The mower's scythe was heard on the grass-plat, and Miss Clairvaux, with a much-worn gardener's calendar in her hand, was preparing for a morning's busy gardening.

"Eleanor," said she, "I want you to be fond of gardening too —"

"I shall like it very much," said Eleanor,

"but you must teach me the very alphabet; for though mamma boasts of having a garden, it really does not deserve the name, so that I am miserably ignorant."

"Oh, if you are but docile and active, you will do. Here, for instance, are some shreds to cut up; and, after that, you can put on your shabbiest gloves and come out to me. I want Jacob to dig up some new compartments for perennials and biennials, and then I shall plant them in; or rather show you how to do so, which will save my back and improve your capabilities. There are all these seeds, too, to sow, though it is early for them. They will come up in six weeks. The gravel wants turning, and the borders want edging, so there is plenty for Jacob to do. And I am going to have a new flower-border cut in the grassplat, so you may design the shape of it, if you like; liable to correction."

Eleanor entered into this new occupation

with avidity and pursued it with zeal. She had been hard at work all the morning when she heard Miss Clairvaux calling her from the house. She instantly ran in.

"Come and have some cake, Eleanor," cried Miss Clairvaux, "and see! here is something for you—" holding up a letter with foreign stamps.

"Oh!" exclaimed Eleanor. Only that single monosyllable escaped her; but cheek and brow were instantly suffused with a bright rose-tint, and, murmuring something about

"How warm gardening makes one!"

She was running off to her room.

"But, Eleanor, I want you to have some cake," said Miss Clairvaux, mischievously.

"In two minutes, dear Miss Clairvaux—I will but smooth my rough hair and wash my hands—"

"Deceit, deceit!" interrupted Miss Clair-

vaux. "I grant you a quarter-of-an-hour for your letter, or as long as you like,"—adding *sotto voce*, as Eleanor ran off, "I have been young myself."

The quarter-of-an-hour lengthened into an hour; in fact, the whole morning stole away before Eleanor re-appeared. When she came down to dinner, it was with saddened looks and red eyes.

"My dear, has anything happened?" said Miss Clairvaux quickly.

"Nothing, thank you."

Claudia being in waiting, there was nothing more to be said. Miss Clairvaux, who had noticed 'Roma' on the post-mark, had prepared some harmless banter, which now was resolutely suppressed. She pressed her to eat, but not pertinaciously, and affected not to notice that her dinner was taken away almost untasted.

When they left the table, Eleanor was slipping away to her room, when Miss Clair-

vaux put her arm round her, drew her gently towards her, kissed her, and said,

"Your letter does not seem to have brought you good news. Can I give you any comfort?"

"None, thank you," said Eleanor, with a catch in her breath that was almost a sob. "It is nothing—"

But her eyes overflowed as she spoke, and she turned aside to hide the tears that would fall before she could get out of sight. Miss Clairvaux did not attempt to detain her; but her heart was full of pity. Mrs. Graydon had enabled her to divine the source of the grief which otherwise would have been a complete mystery to her. The lover at Rome was doubtless at the bottom of it—he was faithless, or unkind, or in some way unworthy. The old, old story, new to each sufferer in turn. If he were untrue to Eleanor, she would be well quit of him; there was no need to force on her such an

unpalatable truth, it would come to her naturally of itself. She would not force her confidence nor obtrude her pity; only win and soothe her by additional kindness; for kindness heals.

Now, for Miss Clairvaux to show additional kindness, one would think, was no easy matter, since she was already as kind as could be; and yet, the minute after she had made this amiable resolution, she was flaming out in high anger, because a railway messenger made an overcharge of sixpence for a parcel. In vain he showed her the book; she said it was evident that the four had been altered into ten, and appealed to Claudia to bear witness to it, which caused Claudia to be overtaken with a fit of stupidity. Then Miss Clairvaux spoke sharply to her, and the man began to bluster and say it was as much as his place was worth to alter the entry; how could she think he would? his character was as important to him as hers to herself. Then

Miss Clairvaux remarked, that it was as much as his place was worth to be impertinent; and he said he knew that as well as anybody, and did not need to be told it; but the money he would have, or else take away the parcel again. Then Miss Clairvaux, with ineffable coolness, said:

"Pooh, that is not to be thought of. Take away the parcel, indeed, when you have only just brought it? Now, look for a moment at the entry with your own eyes—"

But no, he would not; the lady must pardon him; he hadn't made the entry, he was only the servant of the company—if she did not pay what the company charged, he must be answerable to the company, and pay the difference out of his own pocket—he, a poor man with eleven children, two in the small-pox, and obliged to sleep among them all when he did get a wink of sleep; and if there was any overcharge, the lady had only

to pay it and then come upon the company—the company always heard reason.

Here Miss Clairvaux swung round all at once, and said quite placably:

"Well, then, that's what I'll do. I'll write to the acting manager —"

"That will be the best way. He'll be sure to attend to you, my lady, only—"

"Yes, yes, I know. I'll write to Mr. ——: but how about this small-pox? Have your children never been vaccinated? This should not be—"

"Yes, my lady, but the young 'uns couldn't have took it proper. The others must have took it proper, 'cause they haven't caught it."

"How are the children going on? have you proper advice for them?" All this while she was signing the book, and counting out the ten-pence. "Claudia, I have only ninepence halfpenny—can you lend me a halfpenny? Well, and so they are going on

nicely, are they? that's a blessing. You should get your rooms whitewashed, or whitewash them yourself. Your wife might do it. Have you a brush? Would you like me to lend you one? My girls use a whitewash brush quite handily. Never mind the children being marked. Good looks are all very well, by they are not the chief thing, and too often a snare. Well, I wish them all better. Here, you are leaving your cap behind you. I'll write to the acting manager."

Afterwards, when she had cooled upon it, she was rather sorry she had engaged to do so; but she did, because she had said she would.

END OF VOL. I.

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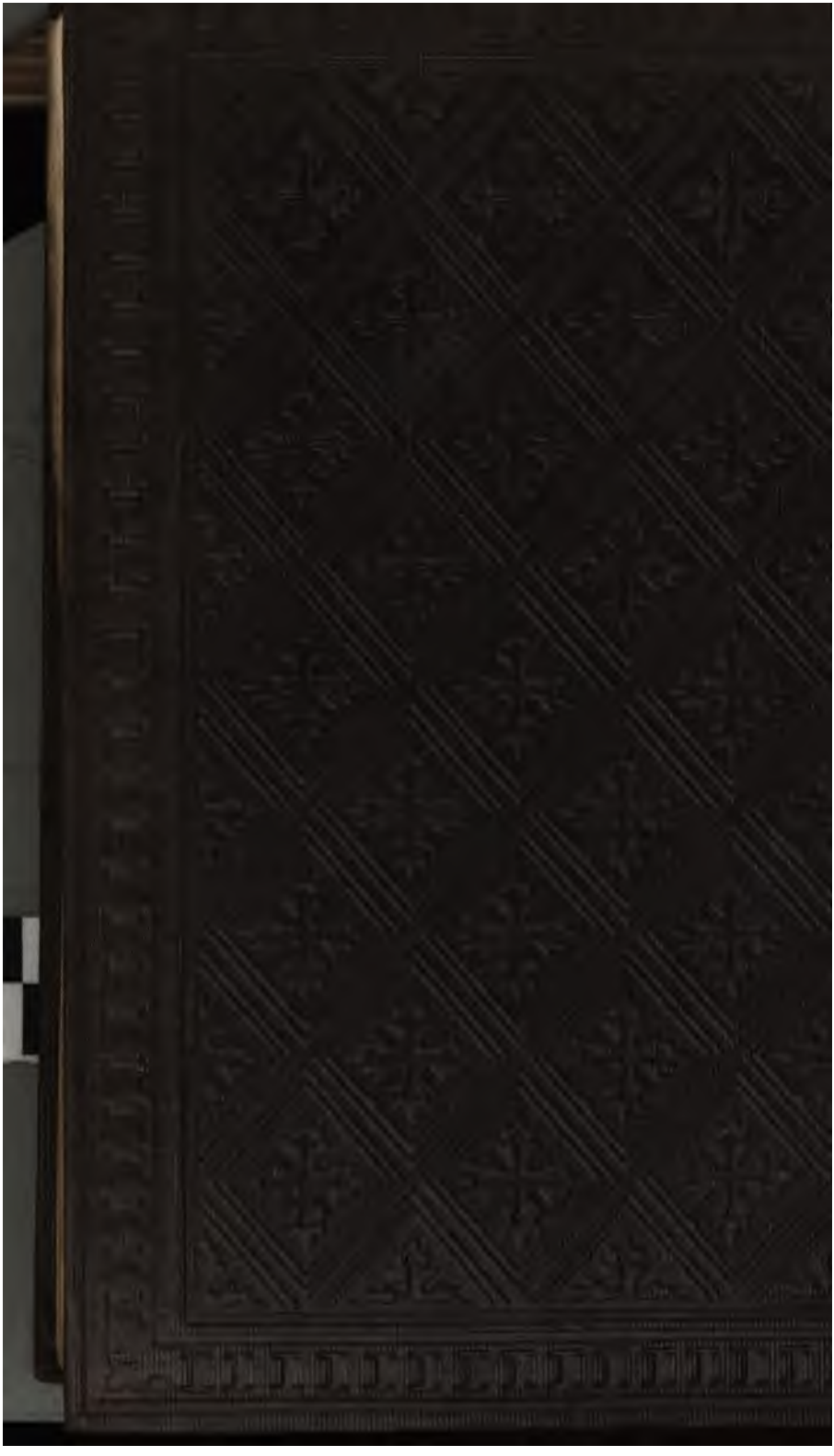
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